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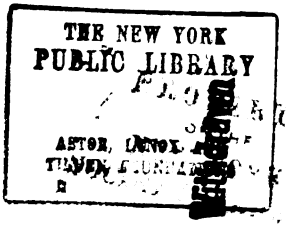
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"Then come a puff of smoke and the prairie was afire."

[Page 237]

THE HUNTERS

OF BUFFALO PLAINS

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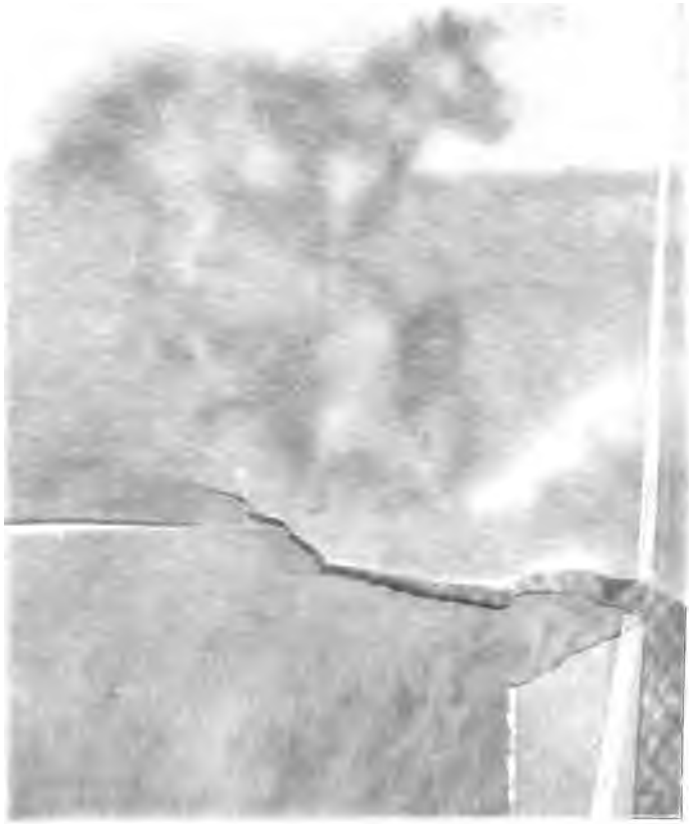

THE WOLF HUNTERS

A STORY OF THE BUFFALO PLAINS

EDITED AND ARRANGED
FROM THE MANUSCRIPT ACCOUNT OF

ROBERT M. PECK

BY

GEORGE BIRD GRINNELL

Illustrated

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

In the days of the buffalo, wolfing was a recognized industry. Small parties—two or more men—with team, saddle-horses, and camp outfit, used to go out into the buffalo range, establish a camp, and spend the winter there, killing buffalo and poisoning the carcasses with strychnine. The wolves that fed on these carcasses died about them, and their pelts were taken to camp, to be stretched and dried.

The work was hard and not without its dangers. Storms were frequent, and often very severe, and the Indians were bitterly opposed to the operations of these wolf hunters, who killed great numbers of buffalo for wolf baits, as well as elk, antelope, deer, and other smaller animals. On the other hand, in winter the Indians did not usually travel about very much.

The following pages describe the adventures of Mr. Peck and two companions—all recently discharged soldiers—during the winter of 1861–1862.

Robert Morris Peck was born in Washington, Mason County, Kentucky, October 30, 1839. At the age of seventeen—November, 1856—he en-

listed in the First Cavalry, and the following year was sent to Fort Leavenworth and took part in the Cheyenne and other campaigns. He was discharged in 1861, and not very long afterward became a wagon-master, in which capacity he served in the army of the frontier. Mr. Peck died March 25, 1909.

G. B. G.

July, 1914.

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THE WOLF HUNTERS

CHAPTER I

TOM'S PLAN

"WELL, men, what will we do?" said Jack Flanagan. "We can re-enlist or go back to the States and each hunt his job, or we can try to get something to do where we can all three stick together."

"Let's stick together if we can," said I.

"Now, hold on, men," advised Tom Vance, "until you hear what I have got to say. I have been thinking a lot about what we'd best do, and last night I think it come to me."

"Tell us what it is, Tom," said Jack eagerly. "'Tis yourself has the wise head on his shoulders, and I'd like to hear your plan."

We were three soldiers of Company K, First Cavalry, whose terms of service were about to expire, and we looked forward with much eagerness to the time when we should again be our own masters instead of being subject to military discipline. Of course, we could re-enlist for another five years, and the government offered induce-

ments to do this. A soldier who re-enlisted within three months before the expiration of his term received a discharge three months in advance of its expiration, with furlough for that length of time and three months' extra pay. At the expiration of that time he was expected to report to his company or, if unable to do that, at the nearest military post. Failing to report for duty on time, he was regarded as a deserter. Tom Vance had served for three enlistments and Jack Flanagan for two. I was at the end of my first five years.

We were at Fort Wise,* Colorado Territory, and it was the summer of 1861. The Civil War was just beginning.

"What is your plan, Tom?" Jack repeated.

"Well, men," said Tom, "as I say, I thought of it last night, and I believe that we can spend the winter somewhere out here in the buffalo range hunting wolves and can make a good stake doing that. We all know something about the plains and something about wolf hunting, and if we can raise the money needed for the outfit, I believe we can make a go of it. The Indians are pretty quiet now, but, of course, we know something about Indians and know that they've got to be looked out for all the time, but I guess we'll be safe enough. What do you think of it?"

* Afterward Fort Lyon, on the Arkansas River, and later abandoned. The site is within a few miles of the present town of Lamar, Colorado.

"It's sure a fine plan," said Jack, "if we can carry it through; but how much money is it going to take?"

"It's a great scheme, Tom," I added, "and it seems to me there ought to be money in it; but have we the capital?"

"We'll have some money," said Tom, "but, of course, we've got to sail pretty close to the wind and to cut our coat according to our cloth. When we get our 'final statements' cashed we ought to have about two hundred dollars apiece. This ought to buy us a good team of ponies and camp outfit, with supplies for the winter. At outfitting towns like Saint Joe, Leavenworth, Kansas City, or Independence there are chances to buy a good team and camp outfit in the fall from people who are coming in from buffalo hunting, and get them cheap, too.

"We ought to go to one of those towns, look out for such hunting parties, and, if we can find what we want cheap, take it in; then we can strike out for the plains by the old Santa Fé road, select a location in about the thickest of the herds, build us a cabin or dugout, and get ready for winter."

Jack and I agreed that the plan was sound, and Tom then asked us for any ideas or suggestions that we might have. We both felt, however, that his fifteen years' service had given him so much experience that he was much more likely to think of the necessary points than we, and we had far

more faith in his judgment than in our own. We asked him to go ahead and give us the further details of his plan so far as he had thought them out.

"First," Tom said, "we must get what we absolutely need, and if we have any money left after that we can buy luxuries. For grub we'd better take about the same as government rations—flour, bacon, beans, coffee, sugar, rice, and salt. A Sharp's rifle and a Colt's navy apiece, with plenty of cartridges, will be all the arms we'll want, and, besides the clothing we already have, each man ought to have a good suit of buckskins. These are better than any cloth for wear and to keep off the wind. We can make overcoats, caps, and mittens out of furs as soon as we take a few pelts and dress them. Most of these things we can get here before we are discharged. The first sergeants of the cavalry companies often have some of these things over and will sell them to us for very little money."

"How about tobacco and pipes?" asked Jack.

"Tobacco don't come under the head of general supplies, and, as Peck don't use it, every man will have to buy his own tobacco."

"How about whiskey?" asked Jack, for he had a weakness for liquor.

Tom answered him quickly: "There'll be no whiskey taken along if I am to have any say in the plans for the expedition. When we leave the

settlements you'll have to swear off until we get back again; and that reminds me that when we get our 'final statements' cashed it will be a good idea for you to turn over your money to Peck, all except a small allowance for a spree, if you must have one."

Jack was forced to yield to the decision of the majority that whiskey should form no part of our supplies.

"Seems to me," I began, to change the subject, "that we've got to decide on where we'll go. Where do you think we'd better locate our winter camp, Tom?"

"As to that, I haven't quite made up my mind," said he, "but it must be somewhere near the centre of the buffalo range and not too far from the Santa Fé road. Fort Larned is about the middle of the range this season, and I've thought some of pitching our camp on Walnut Creek, about twenty miles north of the fort."

"It's now toward the last of August," continued Tom, "and our time will be out in September. We can call for our discharges now any time that we see a chance to get transportation into the States. It'll take us about a month to reach the Missouri River if we go by bull train, and that'll be about the first of October. Allowing about ten days to fit out for the return, it'll take us the rest of October to go back to the neighborhood of Fort Larned. We won't want to do much wolf

skinning before the middle of November, when the winter coat begins to get good, but there'll be plenty of work to keep us busy, building, fitting up camp, and getting ready for the cold weather. It won't do for us to have our camp too close to Fort Larned or the Santa Fé road, for around there buffalo and wolves will be scarce, but we want to be near enough to call for our mail occasionally. Besides that, if Indians should be troublesome it's a good thing to be nigh to Uncle Sam's soldiers."

"They say," put in Jack, "that there's plenty of otter and beaver in Walnut Creek."

"Yes," replied Tom, "we'll be apt to find some of them, but they're nothing like as plenty as they used to be. All those timbered creeks used to have lots of beaver and otter in them, and we'll find some of them, but our best hold will be wolfskins. They are plentiest and easiest to get. We'll take a few steel traps along to try for otter and beaver. We'll take anything we can in the way of fur."

CHAPTER II

WE GET OUR DISCHARGES

THE next day Tom came to me looking rather serious, and I saw that he had something on his mind, and when he had gotten me alone he explained what this was.

"I've been thinking it over, Peck," he said, "and I've pretty near made up my mind that we'd better drop Jack and either pick up another man or else you and me go it without a third man. I am afraid that Jack's fondness for liquor will get him into trouble and so make trouble for us. I hate to go back on him, for he's a rattlin' good fellow when he is out of the reach of whiskey, but, when he can get it, he's a regular drunkard."

"That's so, Tom," I answered; "but when we get started back to the plains we'll soon have him where he can't get whiskey, and then he'll be all right. I think we can manage him by making him turn over all his money except a few dollars to you or to me, and when his money is gone we'll see that he gets no more. If we can get him to promise that after he gets through he will let liquor alone, he will do it. Jack prides himself on being a man of his word."

"Well," said Tom with some hesitation, "we'll take him then, but we must have a fair and square understanding with him and fire him if he don't come to time and behave like a man. We can't fool away time with a drunken man."

Besides being an all-around good fellow, Jack had a fiddle and could play it and could also sing. On these musical accomplishments I counted for much enlivening of our lonely winter's work.

When spoken to about binding himself to let whiskey alone, Jack readily promised that after one little spree when we got our pay he would swear off entirely till the wolf hunting trip was over. He was willing to turn over his money to Tom or to me when we should be paid off, reserving only a few dollars for the "good time" that he had promised himself.

We now began trading with the Indians for the skins needed for our buckskin suits, and as we got them we smoked them, using for this purpose a large dry-goods box, to the bottom of which, on the inside, we tacked the hides in place. The box was then turned over a little smothered fire in a hole in the ground. We found that this way of smoking skins was an improvement on the Indian method, smoking them more quickly and evenly and giving them a more uniform color.

In 1861 the agency for the five tribes—Cheyennes, Arapahoes, Kiowas, Comanches, and Prairie Apaches—was at Fort Wise, and, as the time

approached for the Indian agent to make the annual distribution of gifts from the government, the tribes would come in to receive their annuities. Our trading with the Indians had to be done quietly, because the post sutler had the exclusive privilege of all Indian trade on the post reservation, and, by order of the commanding officer, no one else might carry on any traffic with the Indians.

From one of the cavalry first sergeants we each bought a rifle, revolver, and some cartridges, and such additional soldier clothing as we needed. These purchases were, of course, illegal. It was a serious offence for any non-commissioned officer or soldier to sell government property. On the other hand, it was very frequently done.

A few days later Tom came into the quarters and gleefully exclaimed: "I've struck it. A bull train is corralling about a mile above the post, and the wagon-master has agreed to haul us into the settlements. It is one of Majors & Russell's outfits going back empty, and the wagon boss agrees to take us and let us work our passage, for he is shorthanded. The train will lie over here to-morrow to get some work done, and that will give us time to get our discharges, draw our rations, and say good-by to the other men."

"But, Tom," said Jack, "how can we work our passage in a bull train when ne'er a one of us knows anything about driving bulls?"

"I told the wagon boss that," answered Tom,

"and he said it made no difference, that he had other work that any greenhorn could do—night herding or driving the cavvy-yard. We're to get our plunder out at the side of the road as he pulls through the post. Now, as that is settled, let's put on our best jackets and go over to the captain's quarters and ask for our discharges."

"Well, Tom," said Jack, "we'll let you do the talking for us, for likely enough the 'old man' will give us a lot of taffy and try to persuade us to re-enlist. You can give him our reasons for not taking on again better than me and Peck."

Before long we had marched briskly across the parade-ground and lined up in front of the captain's door, with Tom in the post of honor on the right. The captain opened the door and stepped out, when we all three saluted, and as he returned it he asked:

"Well, men, what's wanting?"

Standing rigidly at attention, Jack and I kept silence while Tom spoke, saying:

"We've called, sir, to see if the captain would be so kind as to give us our discharges so we can take advantage of the chance to go into the States with the bull train that's camped in the bottom yonder."

"Why, yes; certainly," said the captain slowly; "but I had hoped that you men would re-enlist in time to get the benefit of the three months' extra pay with furlough. You are pretty sure to re-

enlist sooner or later, and it would be better for you to take on in your old company. It looks as if the war would continue for some time yet, and, as we will probably all be ordered into the States soon, there will be good opportunities for well-trained soldiers to get commissions in the volunteers."

"We're very grateful to the captain for his good opinion, but we've concluded to go down into the buffalo range and put in the winter skinning wolves," said Tom. "Next summer, if we take a notion to re-enlist, we'll hunt the old company up."

"All right, men," said the captain, apparently not wishing to seem unduly anxious about the matter; "you may go to the first sergeant and tell him I order your discharges and final statements made out."

Thanking him, we saluted and marched off. The documents were made out in due course and handed to us by the sergeant, with compliments on the good service we had all performed and the expression of a hope that when we had "blowed in our money" we would go back to the old company. For some hours we were busy packing up, happy in the feeling that we were once more citizens. We spent some time shaking hands and bidding good-by to every one, and in some cases the partings were rather moving.

CHAPTER III

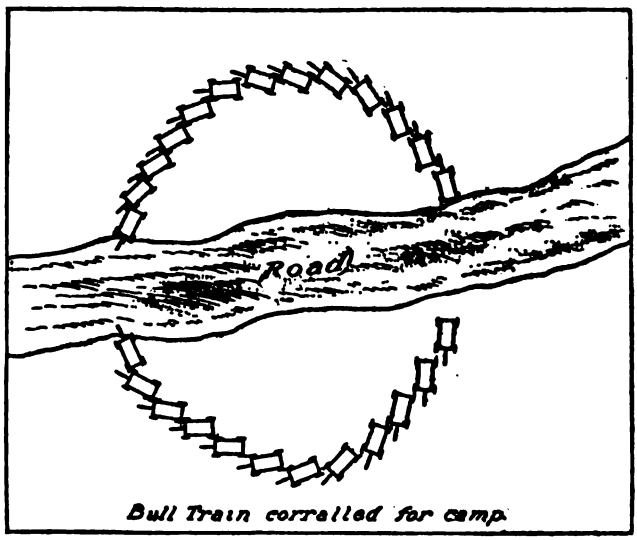
WE FIND AN OUTFIT

WHEN the dusty bull train came rolling along the road past the garrison it found us waiting. Our property was stowed in an empty wagon, and, again shouting good-bys to the comrades who had come out to see us off, we began our tedious, dusty, dirty march with the bull train.

At that time Majors & Russell, of Leavenworth, Kansas, had the contract for transporting government supplies to all frontier posts. Mr. Majors had the reputation of being a very religious man, and in fitting out trains required all wagon-masters and teamsters to sign a written contract agreeing to use no profane language and not to gamble or to travel on Sundays. At starting he furnished each man with a Bible and hymn-book, and exhorted him to read the gospel and hold religious services on the Sabbath. This statement is regarded by many people of the present day as an old frontier joke, but it is actual fact.

The wagons—called prairie-schooners—were large and heavy and usually drawn by six yoke of oxen to the team. When outward bound they were loaded at the rate of one thousand pounds of freight to the yoke. Twenty-five such teams

constituted a train, in charge of a wagon-master and assistant, who were mounted on mules. The travel was slow, dusty, and disagreeable beyond description. At camping time the trains corralled



Bull Train corralled for camp

across the road, a half circle on either side, leaving the open road running through the centre of the corral.

Our route was down the Arkansas River on the north bank, but the train itself did not go to the water. That used for cooking and drinking was carried along in casks, which were replenished at every opportunity. The detail of this travel, while interesting, cannot be given here, but on the jour-

ney we learned a great deal that was absolutely new to us.

On the first night out from Fort Wise we were awakened by a bull-whacker, who brought to our bed two men who had asked for us and who proved to be deserters. We felt the sympathy for them which the average soldier feels for a deserter, gave them a little money and some rations, and recommended them to hurry on, travelling at night and lying hid in the daytime. They went on, as advised.

The next morning a sergeant and two privates from Fort Wise galloped up behind us and stopped to speak to us, asking if we had seen a couple of deserters. We gravely told them that we had seen no such men and suggested that they might have gone west from Fort Wise. The sergeant made a perfunctory search of the wagons and then went on, to camp a little farther along and kill time until it was necessary to return to the post. In those days such pursuing parties often overtook the deserters they were after, gave them part of their rations, and sent them along on their road.

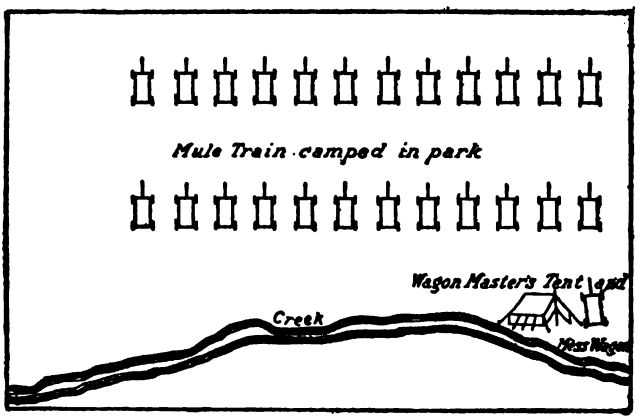
At the Big Timbers, on the Arkansas, we met with a large band of Cheyenne Indians on the way up to Fort Wise to receive their annuities; and when we reached the Santa Fé road, where it crossed the Arkansas, coming from the Cimarron River by the sixty-mile dry stretch called the *jornada*, we saw a government six-mule train,

travelling east, just going into camp on the river bank.

Here, we thought, was an opportunity to get along faster and travel more comfortably if we could arrange for a transfer to the mule train. Its days' drives were about twice as long as those of the bull train, which seldom exceeded twelve miles a day. We therefore sent Tom back to the mule train, and he found in the wagon-master of the train an old acquaintance, who cheerfully agreed to take us on to Fort Leavenworth without charge. Next morning, as the mule train passed us, we bade good-by to our kind but dirty friends the bull-whackers and tumbled ourselves and our baggage into one of the empty mule wagons and went on.

At the Santa Fé crossing of the Arkansas, we had begun to see a few buffalo; and the herds grew larger as we went on until we reached Pawnee Fork, near Fort Larned, which seemed to be about the centre of their range. After we passed the fort their numbers decreased until we came to the Little Arkansas, where we saw the last of them. Our old company, K of the First Cavalry, had built the first quarters at Larned, in 1859. When we passed it, in the autumn of 1861, it was garrisoned by two companies of the Second Infantry and one of the Second Dragoons and was commanded by Major Julius Hayden, Second Infantry.

After joining the mule train Tom, Jack, and I made it our business to keep the outfit supplied with fresh meat while passing through the buffalo range. We also killed numbers of ducks, geese, brant, and sand-hill cranes, borrowing the wagon-



master's shotgun for bird hunting. This suggested to us that a good shotgun would be a useful part of our equipment for the winter's work.

In due time we reached Fort Leavenworth, received our pay from our old paymaster, Major H. E. Hunt, and then went down to Leavenworth City, two and a half miles from the fort. We stopped at a boarding-house kept by an old dragoon who had a wide acquaintance among citizens and soldiers and who could and would be useful to us in getting together our outfit.

The war between the States was now in full blast, and blue cloth and brass buttons were seen everywhere. Several of our former comrades had enlisted in the volunteers, and some had obtained commissions.

According to our previous understanding, I had been chosen as treasurer and bookkeeper for the expedition and began to keep accounts of receipts and expenses. Each man turned into a common fund, to be used in the purchase of an outfit, one hundred and fifty dollars—making a common capital of four hundred and fifty dollars. The balance of each man's money was left in his hands to use as he saw fit, except in the case of Jack, whom we had persuaded to turn over all his money to me. Jack begged ten dollars from me to go off and have a good time, and Tom advised me to give it; but he warned Jack that he would probably bring up in the lockup and declared that if he did so he should stay there until we were ready to start. Both Jack and I had so much respect for Tom's greater age and experience that we never thought of taking offence at his scoldings.

For two days Tom and I were busy going about from one stable to another, hoping to find a ready-made camp outfit, team, and wagon offered for sale cheap. Nothing like that had as yet been seen. We had heard nothing of our Irishman, and I was getting a little uneasy about him and asked Tom if I should not go to the police station, pay Jack's

fine, and get him out. Tom agreed, and expressed some sorrowful reflections on the blemish to Jack's character which his love for liquor implied.

As expected, Jack was found behind the bars. He had evidently received a terrible beating, part of it from a gang of toughs who had tried to rob him, and the remainder from the police who had finally, with much difficulty, arrested him. I was obliged to pay a fine of twenty dollars to get Jack out.

A further search of Leavenworth City failed to show us what we wanted, and we were getting discouraged. To buy a team and a camp equipment at the prices that were asked would take all the money we could raise and still leave us poorly prepared for our expedition. We were considering the possibility of doing better in Kansas City and Saint Joe and had half decided to go to those places when one day Jack came rushing in, exclaiming:

"I've struck it. I've struck just the rig that we want. A lot of fine-haired fellows from the East have just got in from a buffalo hunt with a splendid outfit they want to sell. They will take anything they can get for it, because they are going back East on the railroad and are in a hurry to get off; and who do you think I found in charge of the outfit but Wild Bill Hickock?* Bill told

* James Butler Hickock, better known as Wild Bill, was a famous character in Kansas and the West from 1860 to 1876. In 1861 he was sometimes called "Indian Bill" or "Buckskin Bill," but the

me he'd been hired by three fellows to buy the team and rig up the whole equipment for them, and he'd been their guide. He says it's a dandy outfit. He don't know how much they'll ask for it, but says they don't care for money and will give it away if they can't sell it. They've left Bill to get rid of it. It's over yonder on Shawnee Street, and we'd better look it over and see what sort of a bargain we can make."

nickname "Wild Bill" soon became so firmly fixed that few people knew his real name.

Wild Bill was the son of New England parents, born in Vermont, who moved to New York immediately after their marriage, which occurred in 1829 or 1830. From New York they moved to Illinois, settling first in Putnam County and later in La Salle County. Here, near the village of Troy Grove, the son, James Butler, was born, on May 27, 1837.

He went West when only a boy and for some time served as scout at different military posts and afterward as marshal and sheriff in various new towns in Kansas. He was a man of unflinching courage and a natural shot with the pistol and had many extraordinary adventures, in all of which he was successful. A remarkable incident told of him was the killing of Jake McCandless and his gang of twelve men in a hand-to-hand fight near Fort Hayes, Kansas.

In 1873 or 1874, with William F. Cody and John Omohundro and a number of Pawnee Indians, he appeared for a short time on the stage in one of Ned Buntline's dramas of the plains, but his career as an actor was brief.

In March, 1876, Wild Bill was married to Mrs. Agnes Thatcher Lake and that summer went to the Black Hills, where he prospected. Here, in Deadwood, South Dakota, August 2, 1876, he was murdered, while playing cards, by Jack McCall, who walked up behind him and shot him in the back of the head. McCall was tried at Deadwood and acquitted. Subsequently he was rearrested by Colonel N. J. O'Brien, then sheriff of Cheyenne, Wyoming, and was taken to Dakota, tried, convicted, and executed during February, 1877.

Wild Bill was in no sense a desperado. He was a mild-mannered, pleasant man who avoided trouble when it was possible, but when trouble came he met it with a strong heart.

By this time we were all heading for Jim Brown's livery stable. There we found the wagon in the back lot, and the team, a good pair of mules, in the barn. When we had looked over the well appointed rig and made a rough estimate of its probable value we began to fear that the owners would ask more than we could pay for it. Wild Bill was absent.

I asked: "What do you think of the outfit, Tom?"

"It's one of the best camp equipments I ever saw," replied Tom, "but I am afraid it's too rich for our blood. Those mules and harness alone would be cheap at two hundred and fifty dollars. The wagon is easy worth another hundred dollars, and there is no telling what the camp outfit cost. They must have let Bill fit things up to his own notion, and Bill never did know the value of money. It may be, as Bill said, that they don't expect much for it and they'll let us have it cheap as dirt. We'd better be quick, if we can, before some one else snaps it up."

"Here comes Wild Bill himself!" exclaimed Jack; and sure enough, that first of frontier scouts, in beaded buckskins and with his long, tawny hair hanging down his back, came striding through the barn to meet us. Bill confirmed what Jack had told us, and said that as these young men seemed to have more money than they knew what to do with he had rigged up as good an outfit as he knew

how. He continued: "The wagons, mules, harness, camp outfit, and some grub left over is for sale, but their riding horses are not for sale. They are to be shipped on the cars back to New York. They've got a couple of pretty fair broncos which they got here at starting, and they'll sell you them, or throw them in for good measure. What will you give me for the whole lot?"

Tom asked if he was willing to let us unload the wagon and look at its contents, to which Bill assented. We found it an extraordinarily complete camp outfit, with many duplicate parts for the wagon, a Sibley tent, a sheet-iron cook-stove, a mess-chest, and a complete mess-kit, or cooking outfit. There was a large amount of provisions left over. The wagon and the animals were good and the broncos had saddles and bridles.

While we were unpacking the wagon Bill told us something about the trip, which, from the point of view of the hunters, had been very successful, though commonplace enough as Bill saw it. When the examination was completed Bill asked: "What do you think of the outfit, Tom, and what will you give me for the whole caboodle?"

"It's a good rig, and no mistake," replied Tom with a seemingly hopeless sigh, "but, Bill, I am afraid we haven't money enough to buy it. The outfit was all right for your purposes, but we'll have to buy a lot more things and must have some money left after buying a team and camp

outfit. To buy your outfit would clean us out."

"Well," said Bill, "make a bid of what you can afford to give, not what it's worth. They do not expect to get what it's worth."

"It sounds like a mighty small price, Bill, and I'm ashamed to make you the offer," said Tom hesitatingly, "but two hundred dollars is as much as we can afford to give and still buy our other truck. Would your men consider such a bid as that?"

"Boys, that does seem like giving the outfit away, and until I see my men I won't say whether they'll take it or not, but I'll talk for you a little and help you out all I can. They told me to sell the rig for whatever I could get, and I'll tell them that two hundred dollars is the best offer I have had—it's the only one; if they say it's a go the outfit is yours."

As we stood on a corner near the levee awaiting Bill's return we heard the long, hoarse whistle of a steamboat, and saw one approaching from down the river, though still some distance away. A little later Bill came hurrying out of the hotel and gladdened our hearts by telling us that our offer had been accepted. His men were to take the approaching steamer to Saint Joe, and he must hurry back to Brown's stable and help get their fine hunting-horses aboard the boat.

I counted him out the two hundred dollars,

which he stuffed in his pocket without recounting. We had bought for two hundred dollars an outfit worth at least five hundred dollars.

We soon had the six fine horses on board the boat. Bill went up to the cabin to turn over the money we had paid him. Soon the steamer's big bell clanged, and just as the deck-hands were about to pull in the gangplank, Bill came running out and turned and waved good-by to his employers, who stood on the hurricane-deck.

In the autumn of 1861 there was no railroad in Kansas, and the nearest point to reach the cars going east from Leavenworth would have been Weston, six or eight miles above, on the Missouri side of the river. The railroad from Saint Joseph east was patrolled by Union soldiers, to protect the bridges and keep it open for travel.

CHAPTER IV

BACK TO THE BUFFALO RANGE

AS we started back up-town Bill exclaimed gleefully:

"Well, boys, what do you think? When I offered them fellows the money you paid me for the outfit they would not take a dollar of it, but told me to keep it for an advance payment—a sort of retaining fee—for my services next season. They're coming out again next spring with a bigger party and made me promise to meet them here and go with them."

After Bill left us Tom said: "Bill never did know the value of money. He could just as well as not have had the whole outfit that he sold us or, if he didn't want to keep it, could have sold it for twice what we paid him for it. But he's a free-hearted, generous fellow and never thought of it. He's brave as a lion; never was known to do a mean or cowardly trick; a dead shot. I am afraid, though, that he will die with his boots on, and die young, too."

When we got back to the stable we found Jim Brown, the proprietor, there, and Tom told him that we had bought the wagon, mules, broncos, and so forth, and would pay his charges before

taking them away, as soon as Wild Bill came around to confirm the sale.

"Now, men," said the veteran, when we reached our boarding-house, "we're beginnin' to see our way toward gettin' out of this town, an' the sooner the better, I say; but we've got to do some more plannin'. I'll give you my plans, an' if you can suggest better ways, all right. To-morrow mornin' we'll pay our bills, an' then we'll hitch up an' pull out onto that open ground out t'other side of Broadway and camp there an' go to work gettin' ready to leave here. In camp we can overhaul the outfit an' see just exactly what more we need."

"Nothing could be better," chipped in Jack.

"Same here," I added. "Now tell us what to do to get ready for travelling?"

"Hold on," said Tom, "I've got another suggestion to offer. We're going to have a heap heavier load than them hunters had, an' I'm in favor of gettin' a pair of lead harness an' spreaders an' putting them broncos on for leaders an' work four going out. We'll want to take about five months' supplies for ourselves an' what grain we can haul to help our animals through the winter, an' all that will make too much of a load for the mules alone. We can't afford to feed our stock full rations of grain, but they ought to have some to help 'em through the worst weather an' keep 'em from gettin' too poor."

"That's a good idea; but what if the mustangs won't work?" suggested Jack. "It's a common trick with their sort to balk in harness, though they may be good under the saddle."

"I know that," replied Tom, "an' so we want that question settled right here. Ef one or both of 'em refuses to pull we'll trade 'em off for something that'll work."

On going over to the stable next morning before breakfast to give the team a rubbing down, I found Jack there ahead of me, hard at work with currycomb and horse brush, grooming the stock.

Brown told us that Bill had called and said he should let us have the outfit when we came for it.

After breakfast, while Tom went down street to a second-hand store and bought lead harness and spreaders for the mustangs, Jack and I harnessed the mules and put all our belongings into the wagon. We were delighted to find that the broncos when hitched up walked away like old work horses, which they evidently were.

Moving out Shawnee Street, beyond Broadway, where there was open ground for camping, we made camp near a little creek and, after unloading the wagon, gave everything a general overhauling to determine what more we needed to fully equip us for the trip.

We had noticed a nice-looking black shepherd dog around Brown's stable that we had supposed belonged to Brown; but now discovered that it

was the property of Wild Bill. The dog seemed to be very intelligent and his owner prized him highly.

After establishing our camp our commander, old Tom, gave his orders, as occasion suggested, and Jack and I promptly executed them.

"One of us must always be in camp," said the old man, "for we don't know what prowler might come along an' steal somethin' if we ain't here to watch things. Now, for to-day, I'll be camp guard while you youngsters do the foraging. First thing, Jack, you an' Peck light out an' hunt up some wood to cook with."

As the camp-stove would be so much handier and more economical of fuel than an open fire, we had taken it out of the wagon and placed it on the ground, with the mess-chest near by—just behind the wagon—and, after pitching the tent, moved the stove inside.

Jack and I skirmished along the creek, and each gathered an armful of wood which we broke up into stove lengths, while Tom busied himself overhauling the mess-chest and cooking utensils.

When we had finished our job Tom gave another order:

"Now, while you're restin' Jack, you take the two mules, an', Peck, you take the two broncos, an' go back up the street to that blacksmith shop just this side of the Mansion House an' git 'em shod all 'round. That'll take about all forenoon.

An' while the blacksmith is workin' on 'em one of you can stay there an' the other can go to a meat market an' git a piece of fresh meat an' bring it out to camp right away so that I can put it on to cook for dinner. While you're gettin' the meat, bring a loaf or two of soft bread, too. We've got plenty of hardtack in the wagon, but we'd better use baker's bread while we're in reach of it an' save the hardtack to use on the road, in camps where fuel is scarce."

Leaving Jack at the blacksmith's shop to attend to the shoeing of the team, I carried out Tom's various instructions.

While a kettle of bean soup was boiling Tom was busy rearranging things in the mess-chest and wagon. Fearing that he might neglect the soup and let it scorch, I asked:

"Tom, is there any danger of the beans sticking to the bottom of the camp-kettle and burning?"

"What do you take me for, young fellow?" he retorted indignantly. "Do you s'pose I've been a-cookin' an' eatin' Uncle Sam's beans all these years an' ain't learnt how to cook bean soup without burnin' it? Ef that soup scorches I'll agree to eat the whole mess."

"Of course you know how to cook 'em," I said apologetically, "but I noticed the beans are gettin' soft and thought maybe while you was busy at something else they might get burnt."

"Ain't you never learnt how to keep beans from stickin' to the bottom of the camp-kettle?"

"No, except to keep stirring them," I replied.

"Well, I didn't think you'd a-got through five years of soldierin' on the plains without learnin' how to keep beans from burning. Now, I'll tell you of a trick that's worth a dozen of stirrin' 'em when you've got somethin' else to do besides standin' by the kettle an' watchin' 'em. When your beans begin to git soft just drop two or three metal spoons into the camp-kettle, then go on about your business, an' long as they don't bile dry they won't burn. You savvy the philosophy of it?"

"No, I don't."

"Well, it's just this: the heat keeps the spoons a-dancin' around in the bottom of the kettle, an' that keeps the beans from settlin' an' burning. Savvy? Easy as rollin' off a log when it's explained to you, ain't it?"

After getting back to camp with the mules and broncos newly shod, we had just taken our seats around our mess-box table when who should ride up but Wild Bill. He had heard from Brown of our move and came out to see how we were fixed. As he reined up near us Jack saluted him with:

"Get down, Bill, an' hitch your hoss an' watch me eat."

"Not by a durned sight, Jack; I can do a heap better than that," replied the scout, too familiar

with the rough hospitality of the frontier to wait for a more formal invitation; "but if you've got time to watch me eat I'll show you how to do it."

He dismounted, tied his horse to the wagon, turned up a water bucket for a seat, and sat down to dinner with us. "The smell of that bean soup catches me."

As a surprise, when we had nearly finished Tom went to the oven and brought out a couple of nice hot pies.

"What a blessin' it is, sure," said Jack, "to have somethin' to cook an' somebody that knows how to cook it!"

"Well," replied Tom, "it's better than having a surplus of cooks an' no rations—a state of affairs we all know something about."

"I was just a-goin' to remark," added Bill, "that I see you've got a good cook in the outfit, an' that's no small help. I always knew Tom was a first-class soldier, an' now I've found out another of his accomplishments. Boys, I expect to be out to Fort Larned before long, an' if I ever strike your trail out in that neighborhood I'll sure foller it up an' invite myself to take a square meal with you once in a while."

"Well, I'll tell ye right now, Bill, you'll always be welcome," said Jack, while Tom and I added: "Second the motion."

"My special errand out here," said Bill as he unhitched his horse and prepared to mount, "was

to tell you that when you get ready to lay in your supplies for the trip I think you can do better to buy 'em of Tom Carney* than anywhere else in town. There's where I bought the truck for our trip, an' I found his prices reasonable, an' everything was satisfactory an' packed in good shape. Tom's accommodatin', an' reliable, and an all-round good fellow to trade with."

While standing by his horse Bill's dog had taken post in front of him and by wagging his tail and looking up at his master was trying to attract his notice, seeing which the scout stooped down and began talking to his canine friend and patting him affectionately, which seemed to put the dog in an ecstasy of delight.

"Bill," said Tom, "I've been wondering ef we couldn't manage some way to beat you out of that dog. Don't you want to git rid of him?"

"No, Tom," replied the scout, "money wouldn't buy that dog. But there's been two or three attempts made to steal him from me since I've been here in town—I come pretty nigh having to kill a feller about him just the other day—an', seeing as he's taken such a shine to you fellers, I was thinkin' of gettin' you to take him along with you out to Larned an' leave him with somebody there to keep for me till I come out; or maybe you'd keep him with your outfit."

*Tom Carney, wholesale groceryman of Leavenworth City, was, a year or two later, elected governor of Kansas.

"Just the thing!" exclaimed Jack. "We'll take him along, all right, an' we won't leave him at Fort Larned, either—we'll keep him till you call for him."

"Well, boys, I b'lieve he'll be useful to you, for he's a shepherd an' takes to minding stock naturally, an' he's a good all-round watch-dog—one of the smartest I ever saw. I call him 'Found,' 'cause I found him when he seemed to be lost. You'll have to keep him tied up for a few days when you leave here; after that, I think, he'll stick to you, 'cause he's been used to lookin' after them mules an' ponies all summer. But, mind you, now, I ain't a-givin' him to you—only lendin' him."

"All right, Bill; he's your dog," said Tom, "an' we'll take good care of him till you want him." Thus Found became one of us.

That afternoon Tom began the work of estimating the supplies that we would need for our winter's trip, endeavoring to calculate the quantity of each item of the provisions and from that the weight that we would have to haul in our wagon. As an old soldier, he made his figures on the basis of rations—one man's allowance of each article of food for one day. He said:

"We'll make our estimate at about the rate of government rations, but, as we don't have to restrict ourselves exactly to Uncle Sam's allowance we'll allow a margin in some things to suit our own notions."

Tom calculated that about four months' rations for three men ought to be enough to carry us from the middle of October to the middle of February, and he told me to make my requisition for four hundred rations of each article and set down the number of pounds' weight of each as I went along.

"Of breadstuffs," he said, "we ought to take about three fourths flour—three hundred pounds—and one fourth hardtack—one hundred pounds. That'll make four hundred pounds of freight. Then, as an extra, a sack of corn-meal—fifty pounds.

"As we'll be able to kill plenty of wild meat, two hundred rations of bacon will be enough. At three fourths of a pound to the ration, that will be one hundred and fifty pounds."

So he went through the list of beans, rice, hominy, coffee, tea, and sugar, with vinegar, salt, pepper, yeast-powder, together with two hundred pounds of potatoes and one hundred pounds of onions. With some dried fruit and soap the total weight came to one thousand five hundred and forty-one pounds, to which he added one thousand pounds of corn, as feed for the animals during the worst weather. He purposed to take also a scythe and hay-fork and, as soon as we got into camp, to cut hay and make a stack as added provision against bad weather. These things, together with all the camp equipment to be carried, would

make a load of not far from three thousand pounds for the animals.

To this load I suggested that it would be a good idea to add some interesting books to read at night, and I told him that I purposed to subscribe for some weekly papers which would give the news of current events.

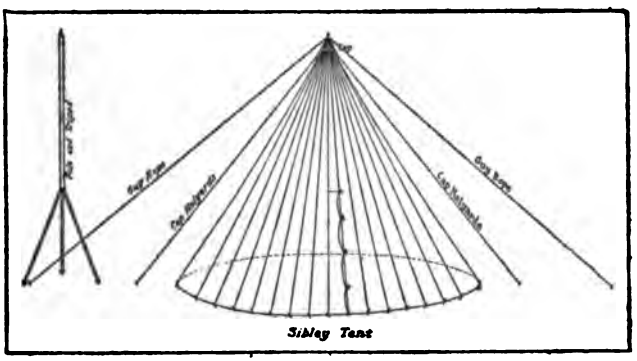
Wild Bill's skill in plains travel was evident in many things about the outfit we had bought. He had fastened straps on the outside of the wagon-box to carry the tent-pole, tripod, and stovepipe, and on the opposite side to hold the axe, pick, and shovel, so that when needed on the road or in camp the tools would be at hand.

On the plains one must be prepared to encounter strong winds at any and all times, and often violent storms, and on this account we commended Bill's judgment in having selected a Sibley instead of a wall tent; for the Sibley is in many respects a most serviceable tent.

It is conical in shape, like the Indian lodge, but in other respects it is far superior to the red man's habitation. It requires but a single short pole which rests on an iron tripod, by pushing together or spreading apart the feet of which the canvas is easily stretched tight or slackened. The aperture at the top for the escape of smoke is provided with a canvas cap which can be shifted so as to keep its back to the wind, thus insuring a clear exit for the smoke. Two opposite doors

secure at least one entrance and exit away from the wind. Its advantages over the wall-tent for withstanding stormy weather and for comfort and convenience are generally admitted by all old campers.

The inventor of this most excellent tent was a private soldier in the Second Dragoons, whom I



often saw at Fort Bridger, Utah, in '58, but whose name I have forgotten.

The next day we drove down-town and bought our supplies and on returning to camp loaded the wagon for the trip to the plains, as Tom directed.

"Put the heaviest truck, such as the sacks of corn and flour, in the bottom an' well toward the forward end," said he, "an' such things as the mess box an' stove—that we'll be using a good deal on the road—in the hind end, where they'll be

handy to git out of the wagon. The tent an' our bundles of bedding can go on top. The camp-stools, buckets, an' camp-kettles can be tied on outside. An', mind you, everything must be stowed away snug or we won't be able to get our truck all on the wagon."

Stripping the wagon-sheets off the bows, we packed the wagon to the best advantage, leaving at the hind end a vacant space to receive the mess-chest and stove. Replacing the sheets, we tied them down snugly to the wagon-box, all around, to be prepared for rainy weather.

Tom, who once had served as hospital steward, had learned something of the use of medicines, and during our stay in Leavenworth he fitted up a small medicine-chest and stocked it with such remedies as he knew how to use, to be prepared for emergencies.

"You may not need 'em very often," he remarked; "you may never need 'em; but, as Wild Bill says of his pistols, when you do need 'em you'll need 'em bad."

As we were to pull out in the morning, Wild Bill rode out to our camp that evening to take supper with us. The evening was pleasantly passed with music from Jack's fiddle, singing by all hands, and wound up by a jig danced by Wild Bill which astonished and delighted us all.

As Wild Bill was mounting his horse to return to town, Tom took the precaution to chain the

dog, Found, to a wheel of the wagon, to prevent him from following his master.

Our commander, old Tom, had given orders for an early start next morning, and before daylight his call, "Turn out, men!" routed us out of our blankets. Tom got breakfast, while Jack and I fed the team and then groomed and harnessed them while they ate.

We intended to feed them well on grain as long as we were in the settlements, where it was plenty and cheap; but after getting beyond Council Grove there would be no more settlements, and consequently no grain to be bought along the road, and, as the grain we were hauling would be needed later to carry our animals through the cold of winter, they would have to depend on the grass after leaving the settlements.

Daylight was upon us when we had finished eating, and, all hands turning to, the dishes were soon washed and packed away, the wagon loaded, the team hitched up, the fire put out, and we were off.

Our team was fat, frisky, and well rested, and walked away with its load with ease; but, following our soldier training in starting out for a long trip, we made short, easy drives for the first few days, gradually increasing them till we reached the maximum—about twenty-five miles a day.

Shortly after leaving Leavenworth we met our old friends the bull-whackers, with whom we had

made the first part of our trip on starting from Fort Wise. They were just getting in with their train, as dirty and jolly as ever. We were gratified to realize that we had gained so much time and avoided so much dirt by transferring to the mule train at the Santa Fé crossing of the Arkansas River.

Later we met more bull trains and other freighting outfits coming in but found few going west. At this season most people were inclined to seek the friendly shelter and comforts of the settlements rather than to brave the inclemencies and dangers of the bleak plains.

Among the travellers whom we met coming in was an occasional outfit of "busted Pike's Peakers," as unfortunate and discouraged miners returning from the Pike's Peak gold region were called. Most of these gave doleful accounts of life and prospects in the Colorado mines.

For a few days after leaving Leavenworth we kept the dog, Found, tied up, lest he should go back to his master; but we were all kind to him, and he showed no inclination to quit our company, and when we turned him loose again he contentedly remained with our outfit.

We found the roads fine and the weather real Indian summer; days hazy, warm, and pleasant, nights cool, and mornings frosty, as is usual on the plains at this the most pleasant time of the year.

While in the settlements we indulged in such luxuries as milk, butter, eggs, and so forth, whenever they were to be bought, and we killed plenty of prairie-chickens with our shotgun.

These prairie-chickens were very numerous in the Kansas settlements, occurring in such multitudes that they were pests to the farmers, eating great quantities of grain. They haunted the settled country or grain-producing parts but were seldom found far out on the plains, though while in the service I saw a few as far west as the Big Bend of the Arkansas.

In the army the Sibley tent was calculated to hold twelve to sixteen men—crowded pretty close together—but in our Sibley, with only the three occupants, there was room for stove, mess-chest, camp-stools, or anything else we might bring inside. Found always made his bed under the wagon, where he could keep watch over the animals and act as general camp guard.

In order to favor our team we made two drives a day, stopping for an hour or so at noon to turn the animals out on the grass, while we made coffee and ate some cold meat and bread. On our afternoon drive, as night approached, we selected a convenient place and camped, turning out the team—except the flea-bitten gray mare, which we always picketed as an anchor to the rest. After supper, sprawled on our beds in the tent, we talked and spun yarns.

Tom having served three enlistments—fifteen years—and Jack two, while I had only five years' service as a soldier to my credit, I was considered a raw recruit and usually listened while they talked. When in a musical mood, Jack got out his fiddle and played and sang.

We seldom lit a candle at night, for we had only one box of candles and knew that before us were many long winter evenings when lights would be more needed than now. We had found, rolled up in the tent, an infantry bayonet—the best kind of a camp candlestick. When we had occasion to light a candle we appreciated its convenience.

Since we first came from the plains into the Kansas settlements we had heard much said about jayhawkers. The term jayhawking as used then was a modified expression for theft or robbery, but was applied more particularly to the depredations of gangs of armed and mounted ruffians, who, taking advantage of the turbulent condition of affairs resulting from the war—the civil law being impotent or altogether lacking in many parts of the scattering settlements of Kansas—roamed at will through the country, hovering especially along main thoroughfares and helping themselves to other people's property. Sometimes they professed to be volunteer soldiers or government agents sent out to gather in good horses, mules, or other property for the use of

Uncle Sam, giving bogus receipts for what they took and saying that these receipts would be honored and paid on their presentation to any government quartermaster—which, of course, was pure fiction.

Where they failed to get what they wanted by other methods they did not hesitate to use violence, even to killing those who resisted their demands.

Such were the Kansas jayhawkers of those times, whom we had hoped to escape meeting; but we had talked much of the possibilities and probabilities of such an encounter and had decided on certain plans of action to frustrate the probable movements of any jayhawkers whom we might meet. We did not propose to be robbed and stood ready to put up a strong bluff and, if necessary, to fight to defend our property. In view of a possible fight, arms were to be kept in order and ammunition handy.

We had nearly reached Council Grove without encountering any jayhawkers and had begun to flatter ourselves that we were going to slip through the settlements without having trouble with them. At one or two places along the road, however, we had heard that a party of jayhawkers had lately been seen on the route ahead of us, and we had been cautioned to look out for them.

CHAPTER V

WE MEET DOUBTFUL CHARACTERS

ONE day, on stopping at a store to buy some feed, just before reaching the crossing of a timbered creek, we noticed two saddled horses hitched to the fence and on entering the store found two well-armed, rough-looking fellows lounging about, one of whom seemed to be half tipsy. The store was also a post-office and presided over by a very old man.

While Tom and the storekeeper retired to a back room to measure out some grain, the two ruffians began to manifest considerable interest in our affairs, asking many questions, to all of which Jack and I, who had left the team standing in the road and walked up to the store, gave rather curt answers.

Apparently not satisfied with our replies, the drunken fellow staggered out toward our team, remarking to his more sober companion:

"Joe, let's take a look at their outfit."

We paid little apparent attention to them but quietly watched every movement they made, for we began to suspect that these were some of the robbers we had heard of.

Each of the men carried a pair of revolvers hung

to his belt. The most drunken one was a large, swearing, swaggering ruffian who was addressed by the other as "Cap." The one named "Joe" was smaller and apparently more sober and wore an old cavalry jacket.

As they walked around the team we heard an ominous growl from our dog, Found. The big fellow stepped back and laid a hand on the butt of one of his pistols, and Jack quickly grasped the handle of his own weapon and took a step or two in the direction of the drunken ruffian, keeping his eyes on the fellow's pistol hand. "Cap" saw the movement and turned toward Jack, still with his hand on his pistol, and remarked with an oath:

"Mister, ef that dog tries to bite me he dies."

"Then there'll be two dogs die," returned Jack quietly, looking the fellow in the eye.

I kept a close watch of the motions of Joe, but he made no threatening gestures and seemed waiting to see what his leader would do.

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded the drunken blusterer of Jack.

"I mean," replied the Irishman quietly, "that if you keep away from that team and attend to your own business the dog'll not hurt you; but you draw a gun to shoot him, an'—well, you heard my remark."

Instead of resenting Jack's ultimatum, the big fellow turned to his henchman and said:

"Joe, these men don't appear to have heard of

me. Tell 'em who I am," and then disappeared into the store.

Joe stepped up to Jack and said in a confidential way:

"Pardner, you've made a big mistake to talk so insulting to that man, an' I'm afraid you'll have trouble about it. That's Captain Tucker, one o' the worst men in Kansas. I reckon he's killed more men than I've got fingers an' toes. Best thing you can do now, is to foller him into the store an' call for the drinks, apologize, like a man, an' make it all up with him, fur he's turrible when he's riled, specially when he's drinkin'."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Jack. "Why, he's a bad one, ain't he? I'm right glad to know him."

"More'n that," added Joe, "he's captain of our company, an' we're the toughest lot that ever struck this country."

"Where's your company, and how many of you is they?" asked Jack.

"Oh, they's a whole lot of us, an' we're camped down on the crick a couple o' miles from here," was Joe's evasive reply.

I began to get uneasy. What if Jack's rashness should bring this gang of desperadoes down on us? Jack was game and would not back down from the stand he had taken. I knew that Tom—who was still in the store getting his sack of grain and knew nothing of the trouble we were about to get into—was game, too, and would stand by the Irish-

man; and if it came to a fight I could at least handle cartridges for them. But what could three of us do against a gang of unknown numbers of these lawless men?

"Jack, haven't you been a little too brash? You may get us into a scrape if he brings up his men."

"Ef there's none of 'em more dangerous than their captain there's nothin' to fear. I've studied such fellows all my life, an' I never made a mistake in one of his sort. He's just such another blowhard as that 'bad man from Texas' that I swatted in Leavenworth. An' on the principle of 'like master, like man,' you'll be apt to find that this big company of desperadoes, if we ever meet 'em, will dwindle down to six or eight windy ruffians like their captain. I believe the three of us could whip twenty of 'em. Such fellers don't fight unless they can get the drop, an' we'll see that they don't do that."

Just as we reached the store door I turned to see what had become of Joe, and noticed him still standing where we had left him—as near the mules as Found would let him come—intently engaged in writing or drawing something with a pencil on a piece of paper. The paper he held in his hand looked like a yellow envelope, and, nudging Jack, I pointed to him.

Joe seemed to be deeply interested in his work, looking first at the mules and then at his yellow

envelope as he marked on it, and did not notice us. I was still wondering what he could be doing when the Irishman's quick wit comprehended the situation, and he whispered:

"He's copyin' the brands on our mules. We'll hear more of this by an' by."

"How?" I asked.

"He'll send somebody to claim 'em, on a lost-strayed-or-stolen plea, an' the claimer will prove ownership by showing the exact brands marked on paper before he has been near the mules. I've known that trick played before."

As we entered the store the old storekeeper and Tom came out of the grain room—Tom with a sack of corn on his shoulder, making mysterious winks at us as he moved toward the door, indicating that he desired us to go back to the wagon.

The store man cast an inquiring glance at the decanter and then at Captain Tucker. The latter nodded his head and said:

"Chalk it down."

On the way to the wagon we met Joe, who had probably completed draughting our mules' brands to his satisfaction.

We told Tom of all that had occurred, and I rather expected that he would reprimand Jack for acting so rashly, but to my surprise he approved of the Irishman's doings.

"Perfectly right, perfectly right," said Tom. "It won't do to give back to such fellows a par-

ticle. If we've got to have a brush with them, right now an' here's as good a time an' place as any. We must bluff 'em off right at the start or fight. But we mus'n't forget the old sayin', 'Never despise your enemy'; he may turn out a better fighter than you give him credit for bein'. We must watch every move they make an' be prepared to bluff 'em off at every trick they try. Jack was right in suspecting that that fellow with the cavalry jacket was copying the brands on our mules. They'll be after trying to prove 'em away from us, ef they can't bluff us."

"Did you find out anything about them from the storekeeper?" I asked anxiously. "You were in that back room so long I thought you must be pumping him."

"Yes, I wasn't idle," replied Tom, "an' I found out a whole lot. At first the old man was afraid to talk, for he's scared of these fellers, but when I promised him that we would not get him into trouble he let out an' told me all he knows about 'em.

"This is the gang we heard about at Burlingame and again at A-Hundred-an'-Ten-Mile Creek," continued Tom. "They came to this neighborhood about a week ago an' have been robbin' and plunderin', an' everybody's afraid of 'em. The old storekeeper says that there are so few able-bodied men left here—most all of 'em having gone off to the war—that the few citizens left

can't well make any organized opposition to 'em. This lot is an offshoot from Cleveland's gang of jayhawkers that we heard about at Leavenworth. It seems, the old fellow says, that this Captain Tucker was a lieutenant under Cleveland, an' they couldn't agree—each one wanted to be boss—so Tucker with a few followers split off from Cleveland an' started a gang of his own."

"Well, but did you find out how many there are in this gang?" I asked.

"Yes. The old man says that they try to make people believe that there is a big company, but from the best information he can get there are only seven or eight."

"What did I tell you?" said Jack contemptuously. "Ef they're no better than these two we're good for that many, easy."

"Yes," said Tom, "ef we don't let 'em get the drop on us I think we can stand 'em off; but we may find 'em a tougher lot than we take 'em for—ef they tackle us for a fight we've just got to clean 'em out, it's a ground-hog case. An' as to killin' 'em, I'd have no more hesitation about it than I would to kill a hostile Injun. Ef we have to open fire on 'em I want you men to shoot to kill, an' I'll do the same. These jayhawkers have been declared outlaws by orders from the commander of the department, an' the troops are turned loose to hunt 'em down, kill 'em, or break up the gangs wherever they can be found.

"The old storekeeper says they've just taken possession of his store," he continued, "helpin' themselves to his liquor or anything else they want, tellin' him to 'chalk it down' an' by an' by they'll settle with him.

"A boy from the neighborhood who had been down to their camp to sell 'em some butter told the old man that there was only seven men of 'em an' they had a tent an' a two-horse wagon. The boy said they had lots of good horses, an' the old man thinks they gather in all the good horses an' mules they can find in the country an' now an' then send a lot of 'em in to Leavenworth an' sell 'em to the contractors there who are buyin' up horses an' mules for the government.

"Whatever happens," continued Tom, "we must be careful not to compromise this old storekeeper an' his family, for he's very much afraid of these jayhawkers an' cautioned me several times not to let them get a suspicion that he had told us anything about them.

"I put an idea in his head, though, which may be the means of ridding this neighborhood of these rascals. I told him to write a letter to General Hunter, in command of the department at Fort Leavenworth, tellin' him the situation out here, an' to request the general to send out a company of cavalry to clean out this gang an' give protection to the farmers an' people travelling the road.

"He jumped at the idea an' said he would

write the letter right away an' send it in by the mail which will go past this afternoon. I think the general will send the troops immediately, for he is makin' war on these bushwhackers wherever he can hear of them. If the scheme is carried out right the soldiers will be apt to kill or capture this whole gang. I'd like to stay an' help 'em at it, but it will take four or five days, at least, before the soldiers can get here. Ef this gang undertakes to make war on us we may have to teach 'em a lesson on our own hook."

"Well, Tom," I asked, "what are your plans for meeting this emergency if you think these fellows are going to give us trouble?"

Before he could answer me the two jayhawkers came out of the store and, without making any hostile demonstrations, went to their horses, mounted, and rode a little way back down the road we had come, and then, turning across the prairie struck for the timber farther down the creek. They eyed us in passing but said not a word. As they rode past us we noticed that both were mounted on good-looking animals, especially Tucker, whose mount was a splendid, large black horse of fine proportions and good movement.

CHAPTER VI

STANDING OFF THE JAYHAWKERS

WHILE Jack and I stowed away the sack of corn and waited for Tom's reply to my question, he stood watching the disappearing riders till an intervening rise of ground hid them and then began to unfold his plans.

"It's earlier in the day than we generally camp," said Tom thoughtfully, "but under the circumstances we must select a camp not far from here an' hang up till we see what they're going to do. Ef we try to go on farther they'll think we're running from 'em. We must camp in open ground where they can't get in shooting distance of us without showing themselves in open prairie.

"I asked the storekeeper about the lay of the land on the other side of the creek, an' he told me of a good place to camp about a half mile beyond the ford, where there's an abandoned house out in the prairie an' a good well. The family who owned the place got scared out and moved into Topeka to stay till times get better. There's where we'll camp; so let's get there an' get prepared for action in case this outfit gives us a call. They won't let us go by without trying some bluff game on us an' maybe a fight.

"I don't think there's any need of it here," added Tom as he looked toward the timber at the crossing of the creek ahead of us, "but, to be on the safe side, while I drive the team, Jack, you an' Peck may take your guns and form a skirmish line ahead of me as we go through the timber."

We did so, but, finding no sign of an enemy, as we again came out on the prairie we joined the wagon and rode up to the abandoned house and camped in a good, defensible position. There was no grass close to the house whereon to picket our team, but some hay that had been left in the barn made a good substitute.

Finding the inside of the house littered with waste and rubbish left by the recent occupants, we pitched our tent near the wagon, as usual, camping by the house merely to secure a defensible location in open ground with wood and water convenient.

We were confident that we would receive a call from the jayhawkers and hurried our dinner, keeping an anxious lookout back along the road toward the store, which was now hidden from us by the timber.

After we had cleared away the dishes Tom ordered:

"Now, men, see that everything is prepared for action. See that all arms are in good working order, an' have a good supply of ca'tridges handy."

Such orders were hardly necessary, for we made it a rule at all times to keep our arms in good shape and cartridges convenient.

"Here they come!" exclaimed Jack in great glee, and, looking toward the store, we could see a party of mounted men just coming out of the timber at the creek crossing. As soon as the announcement was made Tom brought the field-glass to bear on them and began counting:

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven—all told." Then he added: "They would likely leave only one man back to take care of camp; so eight is about the full strength of the gang, just as we heard."

Passing the glass to me, he added:

"As soon as they get in hailing distance I'll halt 'em, an' you men will be ready to enforce my commands. Ef they don't halt at the first command I'll halt 'em again, an' maybe the third time, but not more. An' when I give the command, 'Fire!' remember your old training—aim about the saddles an' let em' have it, an' don't waste your ca'tridges. Let each one of us try to see how many saddles he can empty."

To me this sounded serious, but the veteran was as cool about it as if giving instructions to a squad of soldiers on skirmish drill. Jack always seemed happy when there was a good prospect of a fight before him. I must admit that I began to feel a little squeamish as the jayhawkers drew near

us, but I was somewhat reassured by the firm and fearless demeanor of my comrades.

As the jayhawkers approached it was seen that all except the leader, "Cap" Tucker, carried rifles, carbines, or shotguns in addition to their pistols. All seemed to be well mounted, but Tucker was particularly conspicuous by his fine black horse. They followed the main road till opposite the house where we were and then turned and rode toward us at a walk.

As soon as they had approached within easy hail Tom took a few steps toward them and, bringing his Sharp's rifle to a ready, sung out:

"*Halt!*"

Jack and I moved up in his rear and came to the same position.

The jayhawkers did not seem to be expecting such a manœuvre on our part and did not promptly obey Tom's first command; but by the time he had repeated "*Halt!*" in a louder tone they took the hint, and Tucker quickly ordered his men to stop. Turning to us, he called out in a tone of indignant surprise:

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say," replied Tom. "Ef you men have any business with us, one of you—and only one—can advance an' make it known. The rest'll stand where they are."

Turning and speaking a few words to his men, Tucker then rode up to us.

As the big captain halted a few feet from us he demanded angrily:

"What do you men mean by drawing your guns on us an' halting us this way?"

"In these doubtful times," replied Tom, "we don't propose to allow a party of armed men to enter our camp without first finding out who they are an' what's their business with us. Will you please tell us what yours is?"

"Why, certainly," returned the big ruffian. "We are free rangers looking up stray an' stolen stock an' also gathering in good hosses an' mules fer the government. Have you any objections to that?"

"Not in the least," said Tom, "but we have no stray or stolen stock an' no horses or mules for sale, an' I don't see as you have any further business with this outfit."

"The reason why we've made this call on you is this," answered Tucker. "A short time ago one of my men had a fine pair of mules stole from him an' trailed 'em down nigh to Leavenworth where he 'ost track of 'em. I learned from the old storekeeper over the crick yonder that you men had lately bought your mules in Leavenworth, an' when I went back to camp an' mentioned this matter to Bill Sawyer he got to thinkin' about it, an' he thought that possibly you might of bought his mules without knowin' they was stole; an' so I jes' brung him an' a few more of the boys over to look at your mules."

While the captain was making his little speech Jack gave me an occasional wink, which seemed to say: "Listen to what's comin'."

"Now, pardner," continued the jayhawker, "we ain't in the habit of spending much time arguing about a matter of this kind, an', as I tol' you before, we're a-gatherin' up mules an' hosses fer the government, an' whenever we find any that suits we just take 'em, givin' an order on Uncle Sam, an' he foots the bill. But to show you that we're dealing on the square with you men about these mules, ef they ain't ours we don't want 'em. Now, I'll make you a fair proposition. The man that lost the mules I'm talking about is out yonder, an' he's never seen your mules yet. He's got the brands marked down on a piece of paper. Now, ef you're honorable men an' willing to do what's right I don't see how you can help accepting my proposition, which is this: I'll call Bill Sawyer up here an' let him show his brands as they're marked down on that paper afore he's ever had a chance to see the brands on your mules, an' ef the brands he's got marked down is the same as what's on them mules, why, it's a plain case that they must be his mules. Now, what do you say to that?"

Tom gave no sign that he was "onto their game," but merely said:

"Call your man up, but only him—no more."

Tucker rode out a few steps toward his gang and called:

"Bill Sawyer, come here!" and then returned to us, while William Sawyer, who seemed to have been rehearsed in his part, came trotting up with alacrity, feeling in his inside pocket for the paper that he seemed to know—although he had been out of hearing distance of us—was to be called for at this stage of the game. As Sawyer left his chums they all gathered about Joe—he of the old cavalry jacket—and seemed to be holding an earnest consultation.

As Sawyer reached us I had time to notice that he wore a green patch over his left eye—or the place where the eye had been; a villainous grin added devilishness to his sinister countenance. In his hand he held the same old yellow envelope that Jack and I had seen Joe using to copy the mules' brands on.

Taking the old envelope triumphantly from his man, Tucker passed it to Tom with a confident air as he demanded.

"Now, let's compare the brands marked on that paper with the brands on them mules." And he turned his horse as if to ride around on the other side of our wagon, where the mules were tied.

"'Twon't be necessary—wait a minute," returned Tom as he passed the old envelope to Jack and me with the query: "Do you men recognize that paper?"

"Yes, we've seen it before," we both answered.

"What do you mean?" demanded Tucker in assumed astonishment.

"Just this," replied Tom, looking sternly at the jayhawkers' captain. "This little joke of your'n has gone about far enough. These two men," pointing to Jack and me, "stood an' watched that feller you call Joe—that sneaking coyote out yonder who wears the old cavalry jacket—take this ol' yellow envelope out of his pocket an' copy on it the brands of our mules while the team was standin' in front of the store, when Joe had no idea he was bein' watched. Now, I don't want to hear any more of this foolishness. Mr. Jayhawker, ef you've any other business with us please state it. Ef not this meeting stands adjourned."

Seeing that his deception was detected and that the scheme failed, Tucker apparently concluded to try a bluff on us.

"If you won't listen to reason," said he, "we'll show you what we can do in another line. I'm satisfied that them's Sawyer's mules an' we're going to have 'em. It'll leave you fellows in a bad fix to break up your team by taking the mules, but I'm willin' to do what's right. You give the mules up peaceably and I've got a pair of good, old chunky ponies down to camp that I'll sell you cheap. You may have 'em fer a hundred dollars. I'll just call the boys up an' we'll take the mules along with us now, an'——"

"Oh, no you won't," interrupted Tom in a quiet but firm tone as he began fingering the lock of his rifle.

"Why, pardner," exclaimed Tucker in apparent astonishment, "you don't mean to say you'd be so foolish as to compel us to use force? I've got some forty odd men over to camp. Ef you don't give up them mules peaceably I'll go an' bring the whole company, an' then—well, you'll have to pay fer the trouble you've put us to, in course."

A smile of contempt spread over Tom's visage as he replied:

"Trot out your company an' try to take them mules an' we'll show you what we'll do for you."

Jack and I were keenly alive to all that was going on and, while watching the five ruffians out on the prairie, were prepared to meet any threatening move any of them might make.

Being out of hearing of the argument, the squad on the prairie seemed to be growing restless. One of them called out to Tucker as though soliciting an order to charge on us:

"*Cap, don't you want us up there to settle that matter? Ef you do, jes' say the word!*"

Tucker hesitated before answering and looked about our camp as though calculating the chances. The notion—if he entertained it—was quickly dispelled by Tom, who growled out:

"You give 'em the order to advance an' it'll be

the last one you'll ever give. We've got the deadwood on you two fellers an' we'll give a good account of them others, too, ef they attempt to come on."

Tucker acknowledged the situation by shouting to his men in the offing:

"*No! No! Stay where you are!*" Then, turning to Tom, he continued: "Now, pardner, I've got one more last proposition to make you, to save you trouble, an' that is this: We'll take them mules over to our camp an'——"

"That'll do," interrupted Tom. "I've heard enough of that. You'll never take them mules to your camp, or anywhere else, while I'm alive. You know that neither you nor this other feller has any more right to them mules than I have to the horses you're ridin'. I don't want to hear any more of your nonsense. The best thing you two can do is to git away from here. If I see one of you in range of our rifles again he's liable to git a hole in his hide. Five minutes to get out of range! Now, git!"

Tucker turned his horse and, calling, "Come on, Bill," they started to join their waiting comrades. After a few steps the captain turned in his saddle and, with a threatening nod to Tom, said: "I'll see you later."

"Ef you do it won't be good for you," retorted Tom.

Tucker and Sawyer joined the others, and with-

"Five minutes to get out of range! Now, git!"

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out further demonstration they moved off sullenly back along the road toward the store and soon disappeared in the timber.

"They ain't done with us yet," said Tom musingly. "'Tain't likely that they'll make an open attack on us while we're in this camp because they can't well get the drop on us here. The most natural thing would be fer 'em to slip past us to-night, or go 'round an' get ahead of us, an' lay for us in the timber at the crossing of some creek on the road ahead. I think that one of you men might as well slip over into the timber yonder, near the store, an' by keeping out of sight an' watchin' them you may be able to guess what they're going to do. They'll be certain to stop awhile at the store an' fire up on the ol' man's whiskey, an' then's the time they'll be apt to be careless about talking their plans over, an' after they've settled on what they intend to do they'll go on to camp to get their suppers. After they go on to camp, ef you'd slip into the store an' have a talk with the old man maybe he could tell you what they're up to."

"That's just to my notion, Tom," said Jack. "I was just a-thinkin' of goin' on a little spying expedition after them fellers. I think I can find out what their game is, an' by all that's good an' bad, I'll not come back till I do."

So saying, taking his revolvers and shotgun, Jack struck out down a ravine that led to the

creek and was soon out of sight, while Tom and I busied ourselves attending to the stock and other camp duties.

CHAPTER VII

JACK TAKES A PRISONER

JACK had been gone a couple of hours and it had become quite dark, when our dog Found, by growling, pricking up his ears, and looking toward the road, gave notice that some one was approaching.

On listening closely we could hear some one coming, but the tramping sounded like that of a horse. We had made no light after dark, for we did not intend to cook any supper and our experience in the Indian country had taught us to dispense with lights when in the vicinity of an enemy.

As soon as we were assured that the coming party, whoever they were, were making for our camp, Tom whispered: "Get your gun an' follow me." With that he took his rifle and, advancing stealthily for several paces toward the approaching persons—whose voices we could hear—he squatted down in a patch of weeds on the path leading to the road while I followed and did the same. We had chained the dog to a wheel of the wagon lest he should rush on the newcomers before we could find out who they were.

We had scarcely got settled in the position we

had taken when we discerned two dark bodies nearing us that seemed to be a man on foot and, just behind him, a mounted man.

Letting them come on till they were within a few feet of the muzzles of our rifles, Tom's voice suddenly rang out:

"*Halt! Who comes there?*"

We could now see plainly that there were but two persons, a footman and a mounted man, and heard a prompt response from the horseman, in the unmistakable voice of our Irishman, as they both suddenly stopped.

"Jack, with a prisoner!" This sounded agreeable but mystifying, but the speaker enlightened us by adding: "I've captured Tucker, the jayhawker, and his horse."

We all moved back to our tent and struck a light to take a look at Jack's captures and hear his explanation. But the Irishman declined to talk in the presence of his prisoner more than to answer a few commonplace questions.

By the light of the candle we saw Jack had tied the prisoner's arms together at the elbows, behind his back, with the end of the jayhawker's lariat, while with the other end securely fastened to the horn of his saddle he had been driving the fellow before him.

The desperado seemed now very crestfallen and by no means pugnacious and had nothing to say.

"What are you going to do with him, Jack?" I asked in hearing of the captive.

"Oh, make a 'spread eagle' of him on a hind wheel of the wagon till mornin', I suppose, an' then take him down to the timber an' hang him an' be done with him," he replied as he began to put the first part of this programme into execution.

The "spread eagle" is made by requiring the prisoner to stand with his back against a hind wheel of a wagon; his arms are then stretched out on each side and tied by the wrists to the upper rim of the wheel, while his ankles, with feet spread apart, are tied in like manner to the bottom of the wheel. The prisoner can ease himself a little by sitting on the hub of the wheel, but this affords an insecure and uncomfortable seat.

As soon as we had securely spread the big jayhawker on the wheel, Jack left me to watch him, with a caution to see that he did not work himself loose, while he unsaddled and picketed out the fine black horse he had captured. When this was accomplished he called Tom and me off to one side, far enough to be out of hearing of the prisoner, taking the precaution to place the light near the open tent door where it would shine on our "spread eagle," so that we could see if he made any effort to free himself, and then Jack gave us a detailed account of his trip.

"When I got to a place in the timber where I

could see the store, I saw that the jayhawkers' horses was all hitched to the fence an' I knew they was inside. Pretty soon they all comes out an' mounts, an' all except this man Tucker struck out toward their camp. After seein' them off, Tucker mounted an' struck off in a different direction, up the creek like. I couldn't make out what he was up to, but I thought I would go in an' have a chat with the storekeeper as soon as the coast was clear. I went in an' had quite a talk with the ol' man, an', sure enough, he had heard enough of their talk to make sure that their plan was about what Tom had guessed it would be. They would go back to their camp an' wait till after midnight, an' then mount an' take a circuit 'round our camp, pass, an' git ahead of us, an' lay for us in the timber at the crossing of the next creek, which the old man says is only a mile and a half from here. Tucker had concluded that while he sent his men back to camp he would ride over the route they intended to take an' look at the lay of the land so as to be able to place his men to the best advantage to get the drop on us.

"In going to the place he had kept up the creek for a piece an' then circled 'round across the prairie to the little creek so's not to be seen or heard by any of us here; but in comin' back he had followed the main road, 'cause he knew it was too dark by that time for any of us to tell who he was as he passed along the road.

"I was just comin' out of the timber, after crossin' the creek this side of the store, on my way back to camp, when I spied him a-comin' down the hill toward me at a walk, an' I squatted down so's to get him 'tween me an' the sky, to get a better view of him, to make sure it was him; an' then I made up my mind to take him in right there.

"So I got back behind a tree right beside the road, an' when he got nearly to me I stepped out with both barrels cocked an' called out to him to halt. He pulled up, sudden like, with a jerk, an' asked: 'What's up? What's up?'

"'Don't you make a motion toward your pistols,' says I, 'or I'll put two big loads of buckshot into you.' I wasn't more'n six feet from him, an' he must have seen that he had no show to get away or draw a gun. 'Now,' says I, 'do just as I order you, an' don't you try any foolishness, or I'll fill you full of lead. First thing,' says I, 'unbuckle that belt an' drop belt an' pistols in the road.' He did so, at the same time saying: 'Pardner, I reckon you've mistook me for somebody else. Who do you take me fur and who are you, anyway?'

"'I've made no mistake,' I answered. 'You're Tucker, the jayhawker, an' I'm Jack, the giant-killer'—an' wasn't that a big bluff? 'Now,' says I, 'back out a step till I pick up your guns.'

"He did so, an' I kept a close watch of him

while I gathered in his battery an' buckled the belt around me over my own.

"Then I commanded, 'Dismount!' which he did like a little man, an' I made him tie his horse to a tree; an' then I undone his lariat from his saddle an' made him turn his back to me while I tied his elbows together behind his back with one end of the lariat; an' with the other end made fast to the horn of the saddle, with a good holt of it in me fist, I mounted his fine horse an' druv him before me, as you saw.

"An' now what are we to do with him? No doubt he deserves hanging, as they all do, but it ain't my style to kill a helpless prisoner an' I know you nor Tom wouldn't do such a thing, though I told Tucker, comin' along—just to keep him well scared up that we would hang him in the mornin', sure as fate, as soon as it was light enough to see how to do a good job of it; an' I b'lieve he's afeard we're going to do it, for he's been mighty serious ever since. Ef we was nigh to any of Uncle Sam's sogers we could just turn him over to them, an' they'd fix him, sure, for the order is out fer these jayhawkers to be exterminated to death or druv out of Kansas, an' the sogers is huntin' 'em down wherever they can hear of 'em. By the way, the ol' storekeeper told me that he had sent off that letter, by the mail that went past this evenin', to General Hunter, at Leavenworth, askin' him to send a few sogers out along the Santa Fé road to look after these fellers."

While Jack had been telling us all this we had been standing far enough away from the prisoner so that we were sure he could not hear what was said.

Tom, while apparently listening to Jack, asked no questions and offered no suggestions but seemed wrapped in his own thoughts, and I knew, from often having seen him in a similar revery, that he was studying out some "strategy," as he would call it, to spring on our enemies, the jayhawkers.

When Jack came to a pause Tom began:

"Men, we can't afford to fool away much more time with these robbers. An idea struck me when I saw that big fellow tied to the wagon wheel, an' I've been ponderin' on it ever since, an' if we can carry out the scheme I think I see a way of running a bluff on him an' his gang that will scare 'em out of this neighborhood, an' that will be the next best thing to killing 'em an' we won't have to stay here. Now, listen an' I'll give you a hint of my plan. We'll go into the tent, where we'll be close enough to him for Tucker to hear what we're saying ef he listens right sharp, an' I know he'll do that. I'll give you two men a little talk that'll go to show that instead of our being what we've represented ourselves to be—that is, three wolf hunters goin' out to the buffalo range—we are really three soldiers disguised this way an' sent out here to do a little detective service on purpose to

locate this gang of jayhawkers, an' that the company of cavalry to which we belong is coming on close behind us, ready to swoop down an' gobble up the gang as soon as I give 'em the word. An' then, when we git Tucker to take this all in we'll manage to let him escape an' carry this news to his gang; an' ef I ain't badly mistaken they'll pack up an' pull out from here as quick as they can get away. Now, mind you, I'm sergeant in charge."

"Be the powers o' mud," exclaimed Jack. "That's a fine scheme if we can only make it work, ef it pans out the way you've planned it. Tom—or sergeant, I should have said—I'll always think that a great general was sp'ilt when they made only a private of you. Now go ahead with your rat killin' an' let's be tryin' it on."

As our conference ended we strolled back to the tent and Tom began giving orders for guarding our prisoner through the night.

"Now, men, we'll divide the night into three parts, like a 'running guard,' an' each one of us'll take a third of the night to stand post. An', mind you, don't go to sleep on post or the prisoner might git away. I guess we'll let Jack take the first watch, an' you, Peck, can come on for the middle tour, an' you may call me up for the last turn. Ef you think you won't git sleepy you might bring out one of the camp-chairs an' take a seat where you can keep a close watch of the pris-

oner; but ef you find yourself gittin' the least bit drowsy you must get up an' walk about, for it won't do for the sentry to go to sleep to-night."

"Why, fellows," whined the big jayhawker, "you shorely don't mean to leave me in this fix all night, do you? I don't see how I can stan' it so long."

"Well, as to that," said Jack with a fierce look of assumed heartlessness, "ef it'd be any accommodation to you we might be able to rig up some sort of a gallows out about the barn an' swing you off to-night so's you wouldn't have to stan' there all night. Come to think of it," he continued, turning to Tom and me, "that would be a good scheme for us as well as to put the prisoner out of his misery, fer ef we hang him to-night instead of waitin' till mornin' we'll save ourselves the trouble of standing guard over him, an' that's quite an item. What do you say to it?"

But Tom and I decided that with no better light than a candle, which the wind might blow out, the jayhawker might escape, and if he didn't we would not be able to do a good job of hanging with so poor a light. And the prisoner concluded that he would try and worry through the night on the wagon wheel rather than put us to so much inconvenience.

CHAPTER VIII

TOM'S STRATEGY

CALLING us inside the tent and changing our bayonet candlestick to a position where it would be protected from the wind, while the light would still shine on the prisoner through the open tent door, Tom, in a low voice, began giving us the talk that we intended Tucker should overhear.

"Now, men," began the old man, "the objects of our expedition are so nearly accomplished that I thought I'd better explain the situation to you more fully so that you will clearly understand the parts you are to play in our future movements. Everything is working out, so far, just as the captain planned it. I don't believe that anybody along the road or any of these jayhawkers suspects us of being soldiers or anything else but jest what we've told 'em, that we are three wolf hunters goin' out to the buffalo range. There's nothin' military about our team an' camp outfit except the Sibley tent an' our rifles, an' lots of citizens use them; an' laying aside our uniforms an' puttin' on these new buckskin togs makes us look like three tenderfeet tryin' to imitate fron-

tiersmen. I must give our captain credit for long-headedness, for 'twas him planned the whole expedition."

"An' I give the captain credit," interrupted Jack, "for selectin' a sergeant, among all the non-coms of the company, who could carry out his plans to the letter."

"Thanks," returned Tom with a wink. "An' the two privates that were selected to go with the sergeant shows that our captain knows his men."

"Now," continued Tom, "ef things turn out as they look now, I think our trip'll end right here, for we've got our game purty nigh bagged. The captain, with the company, has kept just far enough behind us to keep out of sight, an' to-night they're about ten miles back on the road; an' ef he gits the message I sent to him this afternoon, which I'm sure he will, they ought to be here, or over about the store, rather—for there's where I promised to meet 'em—a little after midnight."

I could see that our prisoner was taking a keen interest in Tom's remarks, craning his neck forward and turning an ear toward the tent door in an attitude of attentive listening.

"I have arranged with the boy," continued the old veteran, "who carried my message back to the captain, to guide the company up to the store an' to meet me there not later than two o'clock to-night. An' this boy has been down to the jay-hawkers' camp an' knows the lay of the land all

around there; an' when I join the captain an' company the boy is to guide us all to the camp, or nigh enough so that the captain can string the company all around 'em; an' as soon as it's light enough we'll close in on 'em an' make sure that nary one gits away. From what Jack says, they are all pretty full of whiskey an' will be apt to sleep sound, an' it'll be an easy matter to gobble the whole caboodle."

"Sh, sergeant," I said in a loud enough whisper for the prisoner to hear. "Don't talk so loud—the jayhawker might hear you."

"Oh, I don't think he could hear what I say, 'way out there; but it won't make much difference ef he does, fer he'll never live long enough to profit by what he might hear, for he's pretty nigh as good as a dead man right now. His time's short."

Tucker had dropped his head forward—in our direction—as far as he could lean, and had closed his eyes as if asleep, but was trying to catch every word that was said.

"But, sergeant," I asked Tom, "what will the captain do with the jayhawkers after he takes 'em in—take 'em back to Leavenworth as prisoners?"

"Not much," replied the old man. "He has his orders from General Hunter to exterminate these jayhawkers wherever he can catch 'em—to shoot or hang 'em; an' you know our old captain is jest the man that'll take delight in carryin' them

orders out to the letter. We've heard complaints enough from people along the road to satisfy the captain that these rescals are entitled to no mercy, an' you bet they'll get none from him."

"But, sergeant," inquired Jack, "what will we do with this feller? Hang him in the mornin'?"

"No; unless he should try to get away, according to my orders, we'll have to keep him till the company gits here an' then turn him over to the captain. It'll only delay his hanging a little while, for the captain'll fix him quick enough. But ef he should accidentally get loose an' run, why, shoot him, of course."

"Well, I'm sorry," said Jack, "that we can't hang him ourselves as soon as daylight comes, fer I promised him that, an' I always like to make my words good."

"Now," continued Tom, "I want you two men to keep a close watch of him an' give him no chance to give us the slip, for that'd spoil all our plans."

"We'll see that he don't get away."

"Well, as I've got to meet the captain an' company over at the store a little after midnight, I'll lie down an' try to git a little sleep, an' you an' Jack'll have to divide the time between you, guardin' the prisoner, for, of course, I'll not be able to get back here till some time after daylight, an' when I come it'll be with the company. I guess," added Tom after a pause, "I'd better ride

the jayhawkers' horse over to meet the company; he'll make a better mount for me than one of our broncos."

"Yes, do so," said Jack; "he's a good one, I think." Then he added pleadingly: "But, sergeant, is they no way we could fix it so that me an' Peck could go with you on this round-up? S'pose we go out to the barn an' hang this feller to-night, or shoot him, an' say he tried to run—then we could all go."

"No," replied Tom decidedly, "that won't do at all. Remember the old saying, 'It's a good soldier that obeys orders,' an' we've got our orders to hold any and all prisoners we may chance to take and turn 'em over to the captain. Much as I'd like to have both of you along, you must stay an' take care of the camp an' prisoner. But I'll speak a good word to the captain fer you, an' I think I can safely promise that you'll both be made corporals as soon as there's vacancies in the company."

"Well," said Jack sorrowfully, "I suppose we'll have to stan' it; but I hate like blazes to break my promise to the jayhawker, for I told him he could depend on bein' hung at daylight."

"But, sergeant," I put in, "won't the jayhawkers down at their camp, waiting for their chief, suspect something wrong when he don't show up?"

"No, it ain't likely. They were all pretty full

on leaving the store, Jack says, an' they'll be apt to go right to sleep on gettin' to camp an' think no more about it till mornin'. An' ef they do happen to miss him they'll think he got too drunk to git back to camp an' so laid out some'ers.

"Now, Jack," said Tom in concluding this conversation, "you may as well put that candle out an' take post outside where you kin keep an eye on the prisoner. An', Peck, you'll take a turn around camp, to see that the animals are all tied securely, an' then turn in, an' you an' me'll be tryin' to get what sleep we can afore it's time for us to go on."

As we came out of the tent the captive seemed to be just rousing up from a nap he pretended to have been taking and whined:

"Men, would you mind loosenin' these strings around my wrists and ankles a little mite? They're cuttin' into my flesh."

"Well," replied Tom compassionately, "we don't want to torture a man unnecessarily. It'll be enough to put him to death properly, when the time comes, without keepin' him a-sufferin' so long. Loosen up them cords a little, Jack. There won't be much danger of his gettin' away, without you should go to sleep, an' I know you won't do that."

Jack complied with Tom's instructions with apparent reluctance, grumbling as he did so. He purposely slackened the cords on the wrists so

much that the man would probably be able to slip his hands out of them, seeming to rely on his watchfulness and shotgun to prevent the possibility of an escape. Then bringing out a camp-chair, the Irishman sat down with the shotgun across his lap while I made a tour of the camp as directed. Then joining Tom in the tent, I put out the light and we pretended to turn in for a sleep. In reality we lay down near the open tent door, where, having the prisoner between us and the white wagon cover, we could see every motion he might make, for it had been arranged that Jack should apparently go to sleep in his chair and let the jayhawker have a chance to get away.

Jack had prudently taken his seat far enough from the prisoner so that the latter could not, after freeing himself, spring upon him and seize his shotgun, and Tom and I, in anticipation of such an effort, lay down with pistols ready to defeat the move should it be attempted. We had chained the dog far enough away to be out of reach of the jayhawker, for fear that he might catch the fugitive and thus spoil our scheme.

Tucker remained in his fixed position on the wagon wheel an exasperatingly long time before he began to make any move toward freeing himself, and he remained so still that I began to think that he had fallen asleep in spite of his uncomfortable position.

After manifestly keeping awake for a reasonable

time so as to give his actions a semblance of reality, Jack began to nod in his chair, and finally let his head drop against the back of his seat, very naturally, but in a position that would enable him, through nearly closed eyes, to watch every move of the prisoner; and then the Irishman began to snore. Tom and I responded by doing our share of hard breathing, and now the captive began to show some signs of life.

In the dim light I could see him—silhouetted against the white wagon cover—leaning over to his left and working his right arm as if slipping the hand out of the loop that held it to the wheel. When that hand was free he resumed his original position, kept perfectly still for a moment, and, when apparently assured that we were all still asleep, he dropped his free right hand slowly to his waist and carried the hand to his mouth, evidently having drawn his pocket-knife and opened a blade with his teeth. Instead of untying the bonds on his other hand and ankles he had concluded that the quickest and quietest way was to cut them.

After replacing his right hand in its former position on the wheel, watching Jack closely for a moment, and listening intently to our steady, hard breathing, he quietly reached over with the knife in his free hand and cut the string that held his left wrist to the wheel; then replacing both hands on the wheel again for a moment as if tied, he looked

earnestly at Jack and then turned an ear toward our tent door.

Assured by our snoring that we were all asleep, he reached down and cut the cords that held his ankles, after which he gave another earnest look at Jack, took a step out from the wheel, and no doubt intended to steal quietly out to his horse and mount him; but as soon as he started from the wagon the dog gave an angry growl and sprang the length of his chain toward the escaping jayhawker.

Knowing that his flight would now be discovered, Tucker quickly darted around the wagon, to get out of the range of Jack's shotgun, with Found lunging on his chain and barking furiously.

Jack sprang to his feet, calling to the fugitive, "Halt! halt!" as he rushed around the wagon, followed by Tom and me, only to see the form of the jayhawker disappearing rapidly in the darkness. Still calling out "Halt! halt!" Jack let off one barrel after another of his shotgun, but high over the head of the retreating ruffian, merely to accelerate his speed. Tucker made no attempt to get his horse and was probably only too glad to get away with a sound carcass.

After chasing him out on the prairie a little way, calling excitedly to one another to mount and follow the fugitive and try to head him off at some point toward the jayhawkers' camp—all to impress Tucker, in case he heard us, of the earnest-

ness of our pursuit and our anxiety to recapture him—we returned to our tent to chuckle over the success of Tom's strategy.

"'Tain't likely," observed Tom, "that he'll fool away time hanging around here to try to get his horse. He's scared bad, for sure, an' no doubt b'lieves every word of that yarn I got off about the company of cavalry; but, to be on the safe side, Jack, you'd best bring the black horse up here an' tie him to the wagon wheel that his former master jest vacated, an' then turn Found loose, an' I'll guarantee no prowler'll come nigh our camp without our gettin' due notice of it."

"Holy smoke," exclaimed Jack, still commenting on the jayhawker's escape, "didn't he run! When I run 'round the wagon after him I could have shot him easy, ef I'd wanted to, fer he lost so much ground a-zigzaggin' as he run, to keep me from hittin' him when I shot, that he hadn't got very far ahead of me. But after I let off both barrels of the shotgun he struck a bee-line fer the timber, only hitting the ground in high places. He'll lose no time in getting back to his camp an' rousing up his men an' telling 'em about the company of cavalry that's comin' after midnight to surround their camp an' hang or shoot every mother's son of 'em. What a time the half-drunken robbers'll have a-saddling up in the dark an' gettin' away from there in a hurry. They'll put as many miles as they can between them an' their ol'

camp before that company of cavalry surrounds 'em."

After carrying out Tom's orders we all turned in and slept till daylight, when the veteran's usual morning call brought back the recollection of the recent exciting incidents.

After breakfast Tom rode over to the store to see what he could learn of the jayhawkers.

Before he started: Jack asked, "Tom, what are we to do with Tucker's horse?"

"Why, Jack, ef no more rightful owner than Tucker turns up to claim him the horse is fairly yours by right of capture."

"I've been thinkin' it over," said Jack, "an' come to this conclusion: We know that these jayhawkers make a business of robbing people, taking all the good horses an' mules they come across; it's more'n likely that this Tucker has stole this fine horse from somebody hereabouts, an' I think the square thing to do will be to leave word with the ol' storekeeper that in case any man comes along claiming the horse, an' can prove his property, we'll give him up to the rightful owner. If the owner should show up in a day or two he can follow us up, prove ownership, an' take his horse. Ef he shouldn't show up until after we've got out to our winter's camp, or well on the road toward it, we'll leave word with the storekeeper to say that we'll be comin' back this way in the spring an' we'll fix the business up then."

"Good idea, Jack," said Tom. "I guess that'll be as good a plan as any to settle about the ownership of the horse, an' we'll leave it that way."

"As to the horse being mine," added Jack, "in case no owner turns up, I don't look at it that way. This is a partnership concern, I take it, an' everything belongs to all hands. But that horse is a dandy. I was out brushin' him off a bit ago, an' I haven't laid a currycomb on a finer animal this long time. He's young—only six years old—well built, clean-limbed, got good action, fine carriage, sound as a dollar, an' I'll warrant he can run a good lick, too."

As Tom started off, instead of following the road he took a course across the prairie that would bring him to the creek some distance from the regular ford, thus, instinctively, as it were, following out an old frontier scouting rule by which we were taught that in travelling a probably dangerous road one should avoid the regular crossing of a timbered creek as a precaution against being ambushed.

About the middle of the forenoon Tom made his appearance and soon joined us.

In response to our eager inquiries for news he replied:

"Good news. Our strategy won the game. The whole gang, lock, stock, an' barrel, lit out from their ol' camp last night about midnight, an' went in a hurry, too. Judging by the signs an'

what a man told us who heard 'em gittin' away across the prairie, they must have been scared. Now, let's hitch up an' strike the road again an' try to make up some of the time we've lost here—for we've been knocked out of nearly a day's drive by these jayhawkers. I'll tell you all about it as we go along."

We soon had our team strung out and were again rolling along the old Santa Fé road, Jack and I on the wagon seat, with Tom riding the black horse alongside and giving us the particulars of his visit to the store.

"When I got to the store," he said, "early as it was, I found a farmer there who lives down near where the jayhawkers have been camped an' who had come up to report that some time before midnight he had heard considerable commotion in their camp, an' shortly afterward heard a wagon an' some mounted men pass not far from his house, goin' southward across the prairie. He supposed that the gang was breaking camp an' moving away, but couldn't understand why they should light out so sudden an' at such an hour. When daylight come he visited the abandoned camp an' there saw plenty of signs that they'd gone in a hurry. They left clothin', lariats, an' other camp equipage scattered about that they had failed to gather up in the dark.

"Well, when I got to the store the farmer an' the storekeeper was all worked up an' tickled at

the going of their unwelcome neighbors; an' their astonishment was greater still to see me ridin' Tucker's fine black horse an' saddle, which they all seemed to recognize at first sight.

"To explain the situation to 'em, an' how I come to be ridin' Tucker's horse, I had to tell 'em all about the jayhawkers comin' to our camp to try to bluff us out of our mules, an' how we stood 'em off; an' about Jack capturin' the big duffer; an' how we made a 'spread eagle' of him an' give him a good scaring up with that yarn of the company of cavalry coming; an' how we give him a chance to get away; an' how he got.

"I told the storekeeper what Jack's plan was, in case an owner for the black horse should turn up; but he don't think the horse b'longs to any one in this part of the country; an' ef anybody comes 'round inquiring for such a horse he's to write to me at Fort Larned.

"The ol' feller was dreadful uneasy for fear the jayhawkers would find out that we'd gone on out to the plains an' that there was really no company of cavalry behind us and then would come back. But I tol' him not to worry about that, for I believed there would be a company of cavalry here from Fort Leavenworth before long in answer to that letter he had written to General Hunter.

"I put another idea into his head, tellin' him that he could help the soldiers to capture or break

up the gang by havin' a man foller their trail an' find out just where they locate. He took up with the idea right away, an' the farmer said he'd foller the trail. When he gets 'em located he's to come back an' guide the soldiers to the jayhawkers' camp."

As we passed through the strip of timber at the crossing of the little creek where the jayhawkers had planned to get the drop on us we noticed that it would have been an admirable place for such a manœuvre, and Jack and I commented on the possibilities of an encounter with the enemy here.

"You're wastin' your wind," interrupted Tom impatiently. "I had it all planned out to take a by-road that leads off from the house where we camped, which crosses the creek—so the storekeeper had told me—about a quarter of a mile below this crossin', comin' into the main road again in the prairie beyond. In that way we'd have left the jayhawkers 'holdin' the sack,' like the feller that went a-snipe huntin'."

CHAPTER IX

BUFFALO NEAR THE BIG BEND

THAT afternoon we reached Council Grove, on the west bank of Neosho River. It was then a place of less than a hundred and fifty inhabitants but an important business point—the outpost of Kansas settlements and the last town, going westward, until Denver, Colorado, was reached. Travellers going to the plains usually halted here to lay in any requisites for their trip that might have been overlooked in starting from the Missouri River and also for last repairs on wagons and for horseshoeing.

The tires on our hind wheels had become a little loose, and we decided to have them shrunk and reset, so we camped by a blacksmith shop near the centre of the village, and soon had the blacksmith at our work, which he finished before dark.

Making an early start next morning, we rolled out, nooned at Diamond Springs, fifteen miles from the Grove, where there was but one family, and at evening camped at Lost Springs, thirty miles from Council Grove, where Jack Costillo's ranch was the only habitation. So long as the road and weather were fine we wished to make up

the time lost in being delayed by the jayhawkers and lengthened our drives accordingly.

We were now fairly launched on the plains and would see little more timber and no habitations of white men except an occasional trading ranch at the crossing of some creek along the road. We were nearing the eastern edge of the buffalo range.

The road from Fort Riley, that we had formerly travelled in going out to the Arkansas River and back, enters the Santa Fé road here at Lost Springs. At this camp there was no timber and no running water—merely a series of water-holes strung along a prairie hollow. This had long been a well-known camping ground; but where the springs were from which it takes the name I never knew, for I never saw any.

We pitched our tent near where the Fort Riley road enters the Santa Fé and after supper attended to the usual camp work. After we had groomed and fed our animals the Irishman and I strolled up to the ranch to renew old acquaintance with the proprietor, Jack Costillo, also an Irishman, whom we had previously known as a soldier in the Mounted Rifle Regiment in New Mexico.

Costillo was delighted to meet us again and, of course, set out his best for us. We spent a couple of hours very pleasantly talking over old times with him and then returned to our camp. As we walked along, thinking of the Italian name borne

by this man, who, as Jack said, "wore the map of Ireland on his face," I remarked:

"When I hear such names as O'Shaughnessy, Finnegan, or McCarthy given for an Irishman, they seem natural and Irish enough, but now and then I find an Irishman with what seems to be a very un-Irish name, such as Costillo's, for instance. How do you account for these misfit names, Jack?"

"Oh, that's 'asy," replied Jack. "You see, ould Ireland is a sea-girt isle an' is visited by ships of various nations, an' now an' then some foreign sailor, in an Irish port, falls in love with an Irish girl an' marries her, an' the childther, of course, will bear the foreigner's name, though they be as Irish as Paddy's pigs."

"Well, that is a reasonable explanation of a question that has occasioned me a good deal of speculation," I answered, "and, accepting your solution of the problem, my mind will be much easier in the future."

At these roadside ranches, which had sprung up at every important camping place along the road since the Pike's Peak gold discovery, liquor was sold and a small general assortment kept of such goods as were in demand by travellers.

No attempt was made to cultivate the soil or raise crops; they were there merely for the trade of the road and—at points farther out—for Indian trade. They also bought worn-out stock

from passing oufits and, after resting and recruiting such animals, sold them to other travellers needing fresh animals.

The Santa Fé mail contractors, Hall & Porter, of Independence, Missouri, had established stations at certain ranches, but beyond Council Grove there were, as yet, no regular eating or lodging stations for passengers in the mail-coaches. They had to carry their own bedding and take camp fare with the mail hands—two drivers and a conductor to each coach.

At Cottonwood Creek, the next camp west of Lost Springs, we began to see buffalo—a few straggling old bulls at some distance from the road—but as yet no herds. By the time we had reached the Little Arkansas small bands became more numerous and neighborly; and from there on the herds grew larger, till by the time we reached the vicinity of Fort Larned—much later—dense masses of them were to be seen in every direction.

As far west as Lost Springs we found multitudes of prairie-chickens along the road and our shotgun kept our mess supplied with fresh meat. From Lost Springs westward we saw no more prairie-chickens, but as we soon reached the buffalo range we killed young buffalo or antelope.

In running buffalo we used the black horse, Jack's capture, and although at first somewhat shy of the brown, woolly monsters, he soon got

used to them and evinced keen interest in the chase.

In killing a buffalo for fresh meat we usually selected a yearling or two-year-old, to insure tender meat, and cut out only a few pounds of the choicest parts from the carcass, buffalo being so plenty that we seldom thought of the wastefulness of this then common practice.

Antelope, the fleetest and most graceful animal on the plains, could seldom be overhauled by a mounted man, but their inquisitiveness was so great that they would often, in herds of a dozen or more, approach our camp through curiosity; and if they did not come close enough to suit us, by displaying a red blanket we could lure them on, almost close enough to knock them over with a stick. Their meat is tender and well flavored, but at certain seasons there is little fat on it and a little bacon cooked with it improves it.

Coming in from grooming the black horse one day, Jack declared:

"The more I handle that horse the better I like him. He's one of the best I ever rubbed a brush over. I've been wondering who that jayhawker could have stole him from an' dreading lest the owner should follow us up an' claim his property, in which case, of course, we'd have to give him up."

"Well, Jack," I replied, "it ain't likely that the owner of the horse, whoever he may be, will ever

bother us; and when we hear from the old storekeeper, back where you got him, if no owner has shown up there to inquire about him, then your claim is the next best and he'll be your horse."

"No," said the impulsive Irishman, "ef we're to git to kape him he's to be company property —he'll belong to all of us."

"Well," put in Tom, "I've been thinkin' that the black horse is entitled to a name, anyhow. We've named the mules—or Wild Bill did—'Dink' an' 'Judy' an' the broncos 'Polly' an' 'Vinegar'; now, what'll we call the horse?"

"Why not call him 'Captain Tucker,' after the jayhawker?" I suggested.

"No," promptly objected Jack, "it wouldn't be treatin' the horse fair to call him after such a scoundrel."

"How would 'Black Prince' do?" proposed Tom.

"That suits me better. 'Black Prince' it shall be."

Passing successively Cottonwood Creek, Big and Little Turkey Creeks, Little Arkansas, Jarvis Creek, Big and Little Cow Creeks, we reached Big Bend, the point where the Santa Fé trail, going westward, first strikes the Arkansas River.

Before reaching Big Bend we noticed with uneasiness that the tires on our fore wheels were becoming loose. At Council Grove, where we had had the tires of the hind wheels shrunk and reset,

those of the fore wheels had seemed tight enough; but since leaving there the woodwork of the fore wheels had been shrinking more and more each day, until now something must be done to tighten them or we would soon have a broken-down wagon. We had hoped to reach Fort Larned before having to reset these tires, but from Big Bend it was nearly two days' drive to the fort.

Seeing old Tom examining the wheels, I asked:

"Well, Tom, what are we going to do about it? Hadn't we better take them fore wheels off and throw them into the river overnight?"

"No," replied the old man, "that would only help us for a day and by to-morrow night they'd be dry as ever. We'll just give 'em a plainsman's shrinking, an' that's pretty nigh as good as to have a blacksmith cut an' weld an' reset 'em. We'll swell the felloes by puttin' canvas between them an' the tires. The first thing is to unload the wagon."

It was quite a job, but Jack and I soon had the stuff all out and stacked up on the ground.

"Now, prop up the front ex an' take off the wheels."

This was soon accomplished.

"Now, while I knock off the tires you an' Jack can get out your gunny sacks an' carry up a whole lot of buffalo-chips an' pile 'em handy."

By the time we had done this Tom had taken off the tires and laid them down, one on top of

the other, raised a couple of inches off the ground by stones placed here and there under them.

"Now pile your chips all round over the tires, 'bout a foot deep, an' then set 'em afire, an' the breeze'll keep the fire a-boomin'; an' while the tires is a-heating bring the wheels up here close by; get that piece of old canvas out o' the wagon; cut some strips from it long as you can git 'em, jist the width of the felloes; get some of the tacks out of the till of the mess-chest; put the canvas strips on the outside of the felloes, draw 'em tight, an' tack 'em here an' there as you go round the wheel until you get about four thicknesses of canvas on; then give the outside layer of canvas a little wettin' so's it won't burn out afore we can git the tire cooled off. Then lay the wheels down handy to the fire, with a rock here an' there under the rims to make 'em lay solid."

When this had all been done:

"Now get the shovel an' scoop out a little, long hole in the ground close by an' keep it filled with water. Bring the pick an' shovel an' spade an' axe an' hatchet an' lay 'em handy. Then fill all the buckets with water an' set 'em close by."

The wind kept the circle of buffalo-chips that covered the tires blazing briskly, and by the time the chips were nearly burnt out we could see that the tires were red-hot and knew that they had expanded enough to drop over the canvassed wheels.

"Now," resumed Tom, "we'll have to work lively an' make no mislicks when we drop a tire over a wheel so's to get it cooled an' shrunk on afore it burns out the canvas. We'll have to use the pick an' spade an' shovel to lift 'em out o' the fire an' drop 'em over the wheels. Peck, you take the pick, Jack the shovel, an' I'll take the spade. When all's ready I'll give the word, an', Peck, you stick the point of your pick under the top tire an' lift it up a little so's me an' Jack can slip our shovel an' spade under it; then the three of us'll lift the tire out of the fire an' lay it in its place over the wheel an' then go to pourin' water on, an' quick as it's shrunk enough to stay on Jack'll run his shovel handle through the hole in the hub, pry the wheel up, an' with one of you on each side, a-holt of the shovel handle, you can hold the wheel over the pool of water with the lower rim in the water while I spin it 'round, an', with axe in one hand an' hatchet in the other, I'll hammer the tire to its place as it shrinks. Now, do you men 'savvy' all them instructions?"

We "savvied," and, following Tom's directions, we soon had both tires nicely reset and shrunk, and it made a very substantial job. It was hot and laborious work and gave us unusually keen appetites for the supper that followed, which Tom prepared, while Jack and I reloaded our wagon.

CHAPTER X

WHY SATANK KILLED PEACOCK

AFTER supper, as we lay on our beds in the tent talking over old times, Jack recalled to my mind the Cheyenne campaign of 1857 and how we used to gather wild plums in the sand-hills near where we were now camped. He spoke also of a man bitten by a rattlesnake near here. This called out a story from Tom, who said:

"Speakin' of rattlesnakes reminds me of a little incident that happened out in New Mexico when I was in the old First Dragoons. I was a sergeant, an' we had a new recruit in the company by the name of Nesbit—a mighty quiet sort of a feller that the men called a 'stoughton-bottle,' or a 'bump on a log'—a good man for duty, only he didn't make free with the other men or have much to say to anybody. He had a fashion in hot weather, when he was loungin' about camp off duty, of goin' barefooted, with the bottoms of his pants an' drawers rolled up several inches.

"One day, when we was camped on the Rio Grande, water call had jest gone, an' we'd all started out from our tents to water our horses an' picket 'em out on fresh grass. I was walkin' a few steps behind Nesbit when I heard the whiz-

whir of a rattlesnake in the direction of the man, an' as I looked to'rds him I was horrified to see a big rattler that seemed to have hold of one of his ankles an' was a-jerkin' an' squirmin' an' wrappin' itself all 'round his leg; but, as I found out afterward, the snake had struck at his ankle an' caught a mouthful of the roll of Nesbit's trousers an' got his fangs tangled so's he couldn't git loose but hadn't touched the leg at all.

"Well, sir, I was nearly paralyzed with fear an' was tryin' to think of some way I could help the man but didn't see how. He never said a word, but just reached down as cool as ef he was goin' to pluck a flower, grabbed the snake right back of its head so close it couldn't turn to bite his hand when it got its fangs loose, then pulled its fangs loose from the roll of his trousers an' pulled the snake away from where it was wrapped around his leg. It coiled itself around his arm an' kep' its rattle a-hummin', and I couldn't imagine how he was goin' to get rid of it without gettin' bit.

"Well, it all happened quicker'n scat, an' while I was a-tryin' to study out some way I could help him out he knew just what to do an' was a-doing it without asking anybody's help.

"He just reached for his belt with the other hand, pulled his butcher-knife, sliced the snake's head off clean—taking a slice out of his finger in doing it, shook the snake loose from his arm an'

dropped it, stooped down an' dug a little hole with his knife, raked the snake's head into it an' covered it up so's nobody would tramp on it with bare feet an' get pizened, wiped his knife on his britches' leg an' returned it to the sheath, tore a piece off his ol' hankercher an' wrapped his cut finger up, an' went on an' 'tended to his horse—all without sayin' a word or makin' any fuss; an' when I got my breath enough to say, 'Nesbit, that was a close call,' he merely remarked indifferent like: 'Yes, but you know a miss is as good as a mile.'

"It had all been done so quietly an' quickly that the other men passin' by hadn't noticed what was goin' on.

"Well, sir, I count that one of the coolest, grittiest things I ever saw done, an' when I got back to camp I went an' told the orderly sergeant about it, an' he had to go an' tell the captain; an' then the captain sent for me, an' I had to tell him all the particulars; an' when I got through all the ol' man had to say was, 'He'll do,' but I could see that the captain was mightily pleased with the raw recruit.

"Well, the upshot of it was the next evenin' at 'retreat' the orderly sergeant published an order to the company to the effect that 'Private Nesbit is hereby appointed corporal an' will be obeyed an' respected accordingly.'

'You see, the captain saw from that little affair

of the snake that Nesbit was something more than a 'bump on a log,' an' so he give the man a lift to start him, an' in a little while he was made sergeant; an' then, when the ol' orderly sergeant's time was out an' he was discharged, Nesbit was made first sergeant right over the heads of us old hands who'd been in the service a heap longer. But he deserved it, an' I never begrudged him the promotion, for he made one of the best orderly sergeants I ever knew—always the same quiet, cool, nervy Nesbit."

"I always told you," remarked Jack, "that it won't do to set a man down for a fool 'cause his clo's don't fit him.

"Changin' the subject," said Jack, "it's about five miles from here up to Charley Rath's ranch, at the mouth of Walnut Creek; ain't it, Tom?"

"Yes; five miles to Walnut Creek, sixteen from there to Pawnee Rock, eight miles from the Rock to the crossin' of Ash Creek, six from Ash Creek to Pawnee Fork, an' three miles, after crossing Pawnee Fork, on up the creek will bring us to Fort Larned, which is two miles and a half off the Santa Fé road, but in plain sight of it."

"I was thinkin'," continued Jack, "about the Walnut Creek ranch an' some o' the lively times it's seen since I first know'd it. In '57, when we come out here on the Cheyenne expedition, Allison owned it. Many's the time the Injuns made life a burden to Allison, but still he saved his scalp

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an' died on the square. In '58 he left his hired man, Peacock, in charge of the ranch while he took his teams an' went in to Westport, Missouri, after goods. On that trip Allison died suddenly at Westport, an', as he had no kinsfolk at the ranch an' none ever come out to claim it, Peacock jumped the claim an' held it as his own. He, too, had some lively times with the Injuns an' was finally killed by ol' Satank, in the summer of 1860. An' then Charley Rath jumped the claim an' still holds it, but more'n likely he, too, will lose his napper to some o' the Indians yet. It was near the ranch, when Peacock had it, that Pawnee, the Kiowa chief, was killed by Lieutenant Bayard; wasn't it?"

"Yes," I replied, "I was in at the death and had an opportunity to have done the killing myself that day, but Lieutenant Bayard came up and took the job off my hands. You see, I was one of the first to mount and start in chase of the Indian after he'd escaped from the ranch, mounted his horse, and was racing across the level prairie north of the ranch. I was riding that speedy little bay horse that we called 'Greased Lightning,' that the officers used in making races. I'd got the start of Bayard and the rest, overtook the Indian in about a mile and was right alongside of him, with Lieutenant Bayard coming up just behind me, and when I called back to the lieutenant to ask whether I should shoot the Kiowa he replied, 'No, let me

speak to him,' and I gave way and let Bayard come in between me and Pawnee. Bayard called on him a couple of times to halt, on the second demand firing a shot in front of the Indian as a warning, and when he found that the Indian only jeered and made faces at him the lieutenant reined in a little and let the Kiowa go ahead, and, as he did so, dropped his pistol to Pawnee's back, saying, 'Take it, then,' and let him have it—shooting him through the heart. Pawnee threw up his hands and fell off his horse dead."

"Well, by rights," said Jack, "you'd overtook the Injun first an' had the best right to have done that job, but Bayard took advantage of his bein' an officer over you to hog the honors."

"I didn't consider that there was any particular honor in killing that Indian, under the circumstances," I replied, "but I should have done so if the lieutenant had said the word. But Bayard seemed to think that the Indian would halt and surrender on his demand, and when the Kiowa not only refused to yield but defied him, why, there was nothing else to do but to kill him. We thought it strange at first that Pawnee should act so defiantly when we had the drop on him, but Peacock told us when we got back to the ranch that this Indian carried a medicine or charm hung around his neck that was supposed to protect him from a white man's bullet, and when the lieutenant fired a shot and missed him he was sure he

was bullet-proof; but Bayard's bullet killed him so quick that he hardly had time to feel disappointed."

"I don't know but what it was best, after all," remarked old Tom, "seein' that the Injun had to be killed, for an officer to do it, for after that shot the Kiowas started on the war-path an' caused the loss of a good many lives of innocent people an' give the troops a whole lot of trouble an' hard service for a year or more afterward. Ef it had 'a' been an enlisted man fired that shot he'd 'a' been court-martialled an' punished, more'n likely, instead of being honored. So I guess Peck lost nothin' by it, for Bayard was sharply reprimanded an' had to do a whole lot of explaining to get out of trouble for that little job. As to the killing of Pawnee bein' the real cause of the Kiowa outbreak, that was the idea that some fool people back East got of it; but none of us ever believed that, for we knew from the actions of ol' Satank an' his band for some time before that, they was bound to go on the war-path with or without provocation, an' they seized on the killin' of one o' their chiefs as an excuse for turnin' loose on the Pike's Peak emigrants an' others along the road."

"You'll remember," said Jack, "that I wasn't with you the next summer on the Kiowa expedition, for I'd been left back at Fort Riley, in the hospital, but I know Peck an' you"—speaking directly to Tom—"was both with Major Sedgwick's

command in this part of the country when Peacock was killed; an', as I've heard two or three different stories about that affair, I'd like to know the straight of it. Tell me jist how it happened."

"Well, sir," began old Tom as he raised up and began whittling another pipeful of tobacco, "I can give you the straight facts about that scrape, for I got 'em from Charley Rath an' the sick man —you know at the time Satank killed Peacock there was a man sick in bed in the ranch that the Injuns never touched, an' he was the only one of Peacock's men left alive, 'cept Wild Bill an' John Adkins, an' they was away from the ranch somewhere. After peace was made with the Kiowas an' they got to comin' around to the Walnut Creek ranch to trade ag'in, Charley Rath was runnin' it, an' he got all the particulars about it from the Indians who was with Satank when he killed Peacock. So I think I got it pretty straight.

"You'll remember that we—that is, Major Sedgwick's command of four companies of First Cavalry from Fort Riley—had been chasin' the Kiowas 'round over the plains all summer, but hadn't been able to get a fight out of 'em 'cept that little scrimmage our detachment of forty men under Jeb Stuart had with Satank an' a little bunch up north of Bent's Fort, where we killed eight of 'em an' captured all their women an' children an' packs.

"Captain Sturgis, with four companies from Fort Arbuckle, had also come up into this country

on the same errand as us—huntin' the Kiowas—an' he'd had better luck, for he caught 'em up on the Republican Fork an' had a nice little fight an' killed a whole lot of 'em.

"I'm givin' you all this preamble to give you a clear idee of the situation that led up to the killing of Peacock. There was a slight split among the Kiowas durin' this war, for ol' To hausen—Little Mountain—their head chief, with a few of the cool-headed older warriors of the tribe, had refused to join Satank an' the hostiles in makin' war on the whites, an' To hausen, with his little band, had kept out o' the way for fear of bein' mistaken by us for the hostiles. But the biggest part of the tribe, under the leadership of Satank an' Satanta an' Big Tree, was a-doin' their level best to wipe out every white man, woman, an' child on the plains.

"Satank was the recognized leader of the hostiles an' was always very bitter in his hatred of the whites.

"As our two commands, Sturgis's an' Sedgwick's, had kep' him on the jump purty lively durin' the summer, an' he'd got the worst of it all 'round, 'long in the last of August or fore part of September, I think it was, Satank seemed to conclude—as the time was soon coming when the Injun agent at Bent's Fort would be a-giving out the annuities that Uncle Sam sends out every fall to the peaceable Injuns—that he'd better make a

treaty with Major Sedgwick for the winter, anyway, so's him an' his band could come in for their share of the presents. So he applied to Peacock for a letter of recommendation to Major Sedgwick, thinkin' that a letter from such a prominent trader would help him to make easy terms with Sedgwick.

"Well, sir, right there's where Peacock made the blunder of his life, an' it cost him his life, too. Peacock was a pretty smart man an' was acquainted with nearly every Kiowa in the tribe, an' it's hard to understand how he could be so foolish as to do the way he did. But Satank an' his band had made him a heap o' trouble durin' this last outbreak, an' now Peacock thought he saw a chance to even up with his old enemy. So, instead of writin' a letter to Sedgwick askin' mild treatment an' makin' excuses for Satank an' his scalpers, he wrote one reading something like this:

MAJOR SEDGWICK,
Commanding Kiowa Expedition:
The bearer of this is Satank, the leader of the hostile Kiowas and the instigator of all, and the actual perpetrator of many of the atrocious murders and outrages that have been committed on innocent men, women, and children on the plains during this last outbreak. He is, by long odds, the worst Indian on the plains, and you can't do the country a greater service than to kill him on sight.

(Signed) PEACOCK.

"Here was the unaccountable part of Peacock's folly. He certainly knew that that low-down rene-

gade Englishman that they called 'English Jim' was living among the Kiowas at this time; but Jim was a brute an' appeared to be so ignorant Peacock must have supposed either that the fellow would be unable to read writing or else that Satank would never doubt the genuineness of his recommendation and would, therefore, take no steps to test it. But there's where the trader fooled himself.

"The Kiowas were camped across the Arkansas, a few miles south from the ranch. Charley Rath an' his pardner, George Long, had just begun to build them a ranch-house here at the Bend, close to where we are now camped, an' could see the Kiowas passing back an' forth across the river.

"When Satank received the paper from Peacock he and a few men who was with him went straight back to their camp, give the document to 'English Jim,' an' axed him to read it an' interpret it into Kiowa, which he did.

"As soon as Satank heard the purport of the paper an' understood the trick Peacock was trying to play him, he an' the same gang mounted their horses an' rode right back to Peacock's to settle the account. On reaching the ranch, as an excuse for their sudden return an' to keep Peacock from suspecting what he was up to, Satank an' his men never dismounted, but sat on their horses outside the gate an' called to Peacock in Mexican—the Kiowas an' Comanches can nearly all talk a little

Mexican—says he to Peacock, says he, 'Bring your spy-glass out an' look down the road an' see ef this is a lot of soldiers a-coming',—when there was no soldiers in sight nor anything that looked like 'em.

"Never suspecting the trap that Satank had laid for him, Peacock come out with his long telescope an', resting it on the end of a log sticking out at the corner of the house, begun looking through it in the direction Satank pointed.

"While busy tryi·g to focus the glass on a little cloud of dust that Satank kept tryin' to point out to him, the ol' rascal put the muzzle of his rifle to the back of Peacock's head an' put a ball through his brains. While Satank dismounted to scalp Peacock his warriors rushed into the enclosure through the gate that Peacock had left open as he come out, an' it was such a complete surprise to the ranchmen that they were all soon killed 'cept the sick man I spoke of. They found him in bed but never offered to disturb him. I've known of Injuns, several times, a-sparing sick people thataway, but don't know why, unless they have a superstition ag'in harming sick folks.

"When Rath an' Long, down here at the Bend, saw the Kiowas going back across the river, a-drivin' Peacock's herd, they begun to think something was wrong, so they got out their spy-glass, took a close look, an', although the Injuns was two or three miles away, could see that they

had a lot of the ponies packed with what seemed to be some of Peacock's goods. This made 'em suspect that the Injuns had captured an' plundered the ranch, ef they hadn't killed Peacock an his men; so they dropped their work, mounted their horses, an' went a-flying up to Peacock's to see what was up, an' found all hands killed 'cept the sick man, an' he told 'em what little he'd seen an' heerd of the fracas, from where he lay in bed, not bein' able to get out, an' how after killing the other men the Injuns had come to the open door of the room where he lay helpless an' fully expecting to be murdered, an' how surprised an' glad he was when they turned away without disturbin' him.

"Peacock had left no heirs on the place, an' there was no one in this part of the country that had any claim on it, so Rath an' Long decided to abandon the ranch they had just begun to build here at the Bend an' move up an' take possession of Peacock's place, jumping the claim, same as Peacock had done after Allison died. An' Rath is holding it yet, but George Long quit the business an' went back to the settlements—got scared out, I guess. Charley Rath—barring the everlasting danger from Injuns—has got a bully good layout in that Walnut Creek ranch, both for trade of the road an' for Injun trade, for there he gits part of the trade of Kiowas, Comanches, Cheyennes, an' 'Rapahoes; but it's more directly in the Kiowa range than the others."

"Well, Tom," I asked as the old man seemed to be at the end of his yarn, "as the Kiowas are now living under a treaty, do you think their friendship is to be depended on?"

"I wouldn't feel a bit uneasy in the neighborhood of ol' To hausen's band, for him an' his followers has kept faith with the whites right along, through all the late troubles. He's one of the few good Injuns. But his band is a small part of the tribe now though he used to be their head chief. Most of the Kiowas follow the lead of Satank now, an' you know Satank hates a white man as the devil hates holy water, an', although he may keep the peace for a while, it ain't to be depended on. I would never feel perfectly safe in the neighborhood of Satank's band. An' then Satanta an' Big Tree run with him, an' they're as bad as Satank."

"What I was thinking of," I added, "is that the winter camp we're intending to establish, north of Fort Larned, will be right in the range of the Kiowas, and if they should happen to find our layout in the course of the winter they might make trouble for us."

"Well, we won't borry any trouble on that score. We knew there was a risk to run afore we undertook the expedition. When a man goes into the country of hostile or doubtful Injuns he takes his risk. But at this time of the year the chances are that we won't see any Injuns, 'cause they generally hole up in as snug shelter as they can find

in winter an' don't ramble about much. An' then, ag'in, we'll not be more'n twenty miles from Fort Larned, and they'd hardly dare to disturb us ef they should find our camp."

CHAPTER XI

WE REACH FORT LARNED

"NOW, men," said old Tom as we gathered around the mess box for breakfast next morning, "we want to get an early start for we've got a big drive before us. It's only about thirty-eight miles from here to Fort Larned, but that's too much to do with a load in one day; an' we can't divide the distance equally because there's no water anywhere nigh the half-way p'int. By takin' the river road we could get water to camp at the half-way station, but that route, by way of the mouth of Pawnee Fork, would take us four miles out of our way, an' part of it's a sandy, heavy road for the team. So I've concluded it'll be best for us to go the main road by Pawnee Rock an' camp at Ash Creek. That'll make about twenty-nine miles for to-day's drive, an' then we'll only have nine miles to-morrow mornin' to knock off to reach the fort. We can easy do that by the middle of the forenoon, an' have the rest of the day to look up some old acquaintances there an' make some inquiries about the best p'int over on Walnut to locate our winter camp an' how best to get there. Ef French Dave, the

interpreter, is at Larned he'll tell us all we want to know about it. If Wild Bill was here, he'd go right along an' guide us to a snug place for our camp, 'cause he knows every foot o' the ground. It's all open prairie from Pawnee to Walnut, an' once we get across Pawnee Fork we can't miss it ef we just follow the buffalo trails."

We rolled out from Big Bend by sunrise, made a short stop at Rath's ranch to renew old acquaintance with Charley, and in the evening camped at the crossing of Ash Creek, a small stream with a little timber along its banks.

We reached Fort Larned by ten o'clock next morning. I left Tom and Jack to inquire for mail, while I went to the adjutant's office to report our arrival and destination; after which I rejoined the outfit at the sutler's.

"Well, now, men," said old Tom, gathering up the mail matter and putting it away in the wagon, "we must first hunt a camp, an' then we can spend the rest of the day reading our papers an' letters an' rounding up old acquaintances about the garrison an' getting ready to go on to Walnut Creek in the mornin'. I'm told that we can get pretty good grass by crossin' the creek here an' going half a mile up on the other side. We'll go an' make camp an' eat dinner, an' then, leaving one man to take care o' camp, the others can come back and take in the garrison."

A little crowd of idlers had gathered around our

team. A soldier volunteered to guide us to a good crossing and camp, and we soon had our animals turned out and tent pitched, and, while Tom and Jack were getting the dinner, at their request I overhauled first the letters and then the papers, reading to my comrades the most interesting items as I came to them.

The papers and magazines were full of exciting and interesting news concerning the progress of the war, then just getting under good headway. Of letters we got but few, the most interesting of which to me was one from the girl I had left behind me and another from the old storekeeper and postmaster back at the camp where we had encountered the jayhawkers.

The storekeeper informed us that no inquiry had been made for the black horse, and he did not think it likely that there would be as he had learned that Tucker and his gang had stolen many of their best horses from over the border in Missouri and the black horse was probably one of them.

He also informed us that, following out the plan suggested by Tom, his neighbor had trailed the jayhawkers to their new camp down on the Neosho River, near Emporia; that a few days after we left a company of cavalry had arrived from Fort Leavenworth, in answer to the letter he had written to the commander of the department, looking for the gang of outlaws, and the man who had fol-

lowed them and located their camp guided the soldiers to the jayhawkers' new layout, where the cavalrymen succeeded in surrounding and capturing the whole gang and taking them as prisoners to Fort Leavenworth.

"Well, who's going to mind camp, an' who's going over to the fort?" said Jack when dinner was over.

"We'll draw straws for it," said Tom decisively. "Peck, you prepare the straws, two long ones an' a short one, an' the man who gets the short one stays."

I did as directed. Tom and Jack drew the long straws, and I got left.

"Well, rack out now, you fellows, and I'll have a good time reading the papers while you're gone," said I, trying to console myself for the lonesome afternoon I expected to have.

But I was not left alone long, for presently a couple of strolling soldiers from the garrison dropped in, and we passed some time in exchanging information, I giving them the latest news from the settlements, and they telling the gossip of Fort Larned and vicinity.

We had not been out of sight of herds of buffalo since we had entered the range till we crossed Pawnee Fork, but here, near the fort, where they had probably been hunted more than elsewhere, they were scarce, though this was about the centre of their range east and west. The soldiers said

that a few miles out in any direction we would find them numerous again.

To my comrades and me the country about Fort Larned was familiar ground. As already stated, our company—K of the old First Cavalry, afterward changed to Fourth Cavalry—had built and occupied the original military post, called "Camp Alert," in the adjoining bend of the creek, below Fort Larned, in the fall of '59, when the Kiowas were on the war-path. During that winter we had been stationed there, escorting the Santa Fé mails and giving what protection we could to travel on the roads to New Mexico and the Pike's Peak gold region. By the following spring (1860), the War Department had ordered a permanent post established at or near "Camp Alert," to be called Fort Larned. This post was built by the two companies of Second Infantry that were sent to relieve us, while we, joining Major Sedgwick's command from Fort Riley, went on the Kiowa expedition.

My two years of hard service along the Arkansas gave me an interest in everything that had happened in this part of the country, and I kept my soldier visitors plied with questions about persons and events until the approach of sunset warned them to return to the post to prepare for dress parade.

Tom and Jack remained at the garrison till after dress parade and then joined me in time for the supper which I had prepared.

In narrating the results of his inquiries at the post Tom said:

"As we had all been pretty well acquainted with Weisselbaum when he used to keep the little store in Ogden, near Fort Riley, before he got to be sutler of this post, I thought I would first call on him an' renew old acquaintance. When I tried to remind him who I was an' the many times I had been in his store at Ogden an' bought goods of him he couldn't remember me at all. An' then I asked him if he remembered Jack an' Peck, tellin' him that you was both here with me an' the object of our trip an' so forth, but he couldn't recall either of us an' looked at me kind of suspicious like, as though he was afraid I was goin' to ask him to credit me for a plug of tobacco or something of that kind.

"To set him straight on that point I called for a couple of cigars, an' in paying for 'em I managed to show several greenbacks, an', my, what a change come over his countenance when he saw that money! The sight of them greenbacks at once refreshed his recollection.

"He suggested that we should leave our surplus money in his safe, and I believe it's a good scheme, for we'll have no use for money over on the Walnut, where we're going, an' we might lose it. Peck might go over to the store now, takin' Jack along for a witness, an' deposit our money with the sutler an' take a receipt for it; an' if we have occasion

to draw any of it out at any time it can be entered on the back of the receipt. Savvy?"

We "savvied" and agreed to Tom's plan.

"Weisselbaum told me," continued the old man, "where to find 'French Dave,' an' Dave told me that it's all plain sailing an' about twenty miles from here over to Walnut in the nearest direction, straight north; an' there'll be no rough ground to get over except the head of Ash Creek, an' there ain't much there. He says by bearin' a little to the west of north we'll miss the breaks of Ash Creek an' strike Walnut about the mouth of a little creek putting into Walnut from the south, where there's a snug place for a well-sheltered winter camp, with timber on the north an' west; an' I think that's just about the kind of a layout we want to find."

"What does Dave say about the Kiowas?" I asked.

"He says they're peaceable so far, 'but always keep your eye skinned,' sez he, 'whenever Satank or Satanta, with their bands, come around.' But of course we knew that."

Jack and I hurried over to the sutler's store, where we were very affably received by Weisselbaum, who shook us warmly by the hands and now had no difficulty in remembering us. We made our deposit, took his receipt, and returned to camp. After reporting to Tom the result of our trip, Jack remarked:

"Well, I don't know of any surer winnin' game than a post sutler's job. It'll beat four aces an' a six-shooter."

"Right you are, my lad," chipped in Tom. "It's a sure shot—dead open an' shut. Better'n a gold-mine, for there's little risk an' small loss compared with the profits; for the post sutler on the frontier just rakes in the money of officers, soldiers, citizens, Injuns, an' everybody. Besides havin' a monopoly of all trade on the post reservation, he generally has the inside track on forage contracts an' the like."

"Do you mind old Rich, the sutler at Fort Leavenworth?" asked Jack, "an' the dead oodles of money he rakes in all the time? An' he's been sutler there so long, too, he must be as rich as the Rothschilds. A queer duck is old Rich," he continued reflectively, "or 'Kernel' Rich, I should have said, for when you call him 'Kernel,' 'specially if you salute him along with it, it pleases him all over an' raises his opinion of himself about five hundred per cent."

"Yes," replied Tom, "I remember one time when several of us soldiers were a-standing around old Rich's store door, an' among the lot was Bob Chambers, of F Company. You know Bob always had his cheek with him. Well, while we were a-talking, Bill Shutts come out of the store a-grumbling an' a-cussing. 'What's the matter, Shutts?' asked Bob. 'Why, I'm expectin' a let-

ter from home,' says Bill, 'an' when I asked that old galoot if there was a letter for me, the old fellow wouldn't look—never even asked me my name—but just says, crabbed like, says he: 'No, nothin' for you.' 'Now,' says Bill, 'I'll bet two dollars an' sixty-five cents that there's a letter in there right now for William Shutts, Esquire, from Dresden, O., but I can't get it.'

"'Why, man,' says Bob Chambers, 'where've you been all this time that you ain't got acquainted with that estimable old gentleman, Kernel Rich? You ain't onto the combination, that's all. Now, I'll bet you the drinks for the crowd, down at old mother Bangs's, that I'll go in the store an' ask the kernel for a letter, an' although I ain't expecting one, an' would be surprised if I got one, the old kernel'll rush flying 'round behind the counter a-trying to find me a letter. Now, lemme show you how it's done,' sez Bob, a-buttonin' up his jacket an' a-cockin' his fatigue cap up on three hairs.

"We all followed him into the store to see the performance. The old kernel was pacin' the floor. By a 'left-front-into-line' movement Bob swung himself into position in front of the kernel, halted, come to 'attention,' bringing his heels together with a crack, an' raised his right hand to the peak of his cap as he asked: 'Kernel, is there any letter in the office for me, sir?'

"Well, say—you ought to have seen the smile

that come over old Rich's phiz as he fell all over himself getting 'round behind the counter, asking as he went: 'What's the name, my man?' 'Robert Chambers, of F Company, sir,' says Bob, still standing to 'attention.'

"Well, sir, the old kernel shuffled those letters over two or three times a-tryin' his level best to dig up one for Chambers, an' seemed awfully sorry when he had to say, as he put them back in the pigeonhole: 'No, nothing for you to-day, Chambers.' An' he was so sorry to disappoint Bob that he reached over on the shelf an' handed out a plug of tobacco, as he added, sort of regretful-like: 'But there's some of the best navy tobacco you ever smacked your lips over.' 'No doubt of it, kernel, for when you recommend a thing it's bound to be first class, but unfortunately I'm dead broke,' says Chambers. 'Oh, take it along,' says the old man, as he pushed the plug across the counter; 'you can hand me the money next pay-day.' An' he was so pleased with Bob's blarney that he never even chalked it down to him; an' I'm dead sure that Chambers didn't remind him of it when pay-day come, for Bob wasn't built that way.

"As we started out of the store, Bob says over his shoulder like for old Rich to hear, 'Kernel Rich is one of the finest old gentlemen I ever knew.'

"When we got outside the store door again, Bill Shutts remarked, as he gazed at Chambers in

honest admiration 'Well, old pard, if I had your cheek I'd never work another lick.' 'It's all done by a slight turn of the wrist, as the magician says,' said Bob; 'anybody can do it that knows how. Now, let me tell you how to get that letter of yours. Just go over to the quarters an' wash your face an' hands for a disguise, black your boots, button up your jacket, brace up, an' look brave; and then go back to the store—by that time the old man's forgot you ever asked for a letter—then execute a flank movement on him, like I did; be sure to salute an' call him kernel, an' you'll get a letter if he has to write you one.'

"An' by following Bob's advice Bill got his letter; an' it tickled him so't he called us together, an' we went down to old mother Bangs's, an' he set up the drinks on it, 'cause he said that trick that Bob learnt him was worth a whole lot, if not more."

CHAPTER XII

OUR CAMP ON WALNUT CREEK

NEXT morning at breakfast I said:

"How was it, Tom, that when we were buying our outfit at Leavenworth we forgot to get a compass? That is a pretty useful thing in travelling across the prairie, where there is no road or trail to follow?"

"Well," replied Tom, "it would be handy to have a compass, but we haven't got one and so we'll have to do the next best thing, and thank the Lord I have a good watch to run our course by."

"What!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean that you can tell the points of the compass by a watch?" And Jack chimed in: "I never heard of the like."

"If you live long enough, young fellows, you may find out that there are some other things you never heard of. Look here, I'll explain to you how it's done," and Tom pulled his big silver watch out of his pocket, opened it, and put it on the table.

"You turn the watch so that the hour-hand points to the sun; then measure just half-way to the figure twelve on the dial in the shortest direction, and that will be south. Of course, the oppo-

site point will be north, and you can tell east or west.

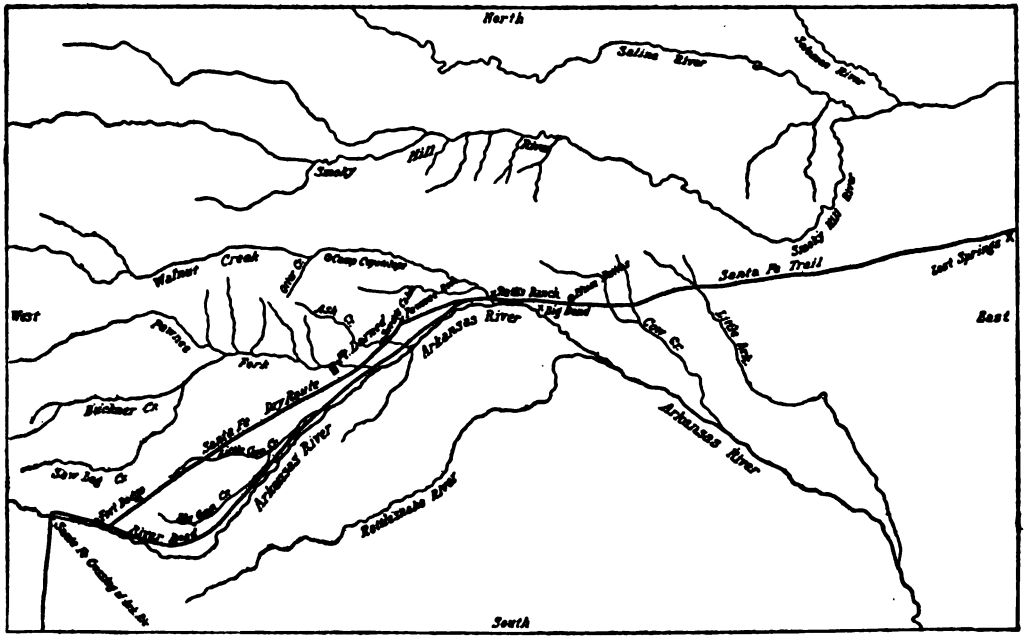
"If you get it firmly fixed in your mind that, with the hour-hand of a watch pointing to the sun, half-way between that and the figure twelve in the shortest direction on the dial is south, you can always get the points of the compass when the sun is shining."

"Whoever taught you that watch trick, Tom?" I asked.

"First Lieutenant James E. B. Stuart, late of G Company, First Cavalry, and now an officer in the rebel army, learnt me that once when I was out on a scout with him in the mountains and we got lost," answered Tom. "It was cloudy and we wandered about in every direction except the right one, as lost men will do. After a while the sun came out for a little while and I saw Jeb halt, take out his watch, and look at the sun. Then he said: 'Now, I have got it. The trail is off in this direction,' pointing with his right hand, while he held the watch in the left. Then he called to me: 'Come here, sergeant, and I will show you how to tell north and south by a watch. It may be useful to you some day.' And then he explained it to me, and many's the time it has been useful."

By the time we had everything packed up after breakfast and the team strung out, the sun was up and we started north.

We ran a fairly straight line, bearing a little to



Where Old Fort Larned Stood

the west, to the head of Ash Creek, which we found here to be only a prairie hollow destitute of water and timber. Before reaching Ash Creek we had begun to see plenty of buffalo in every direction except toward Fort Larned.

On reaching the high prairie north of Ash Creek we could see away to the north the distant line of timber that marked the course of Walnut Creek. A heavy body of timber was seen right ahead, and in line with our course, that Tom rightly conjectured was at the mouth of the little creek emptying into the Walnut, where French Dave had told him we would find a suitable location for a winter camp. Toward this we directed our course.

It was but little past noon when we reached the edge of the timber near the junction of the little branch and Walnut Creek, and we found here an ideal spot for our purpose—a snug camp and good hunting and trapping ground.

"We'll camp here for the night," said Tom as he dismounted, "an' to-morrow we'll look the neighborhood over thoroughly an' decide where to pitch our permanent layout."

As we had found no water on the road we had made this drive from Pawnee Fork without our usual halt for noon and decided to have our dinner and supper in one about the middle of the afternoon. After turning out the stock, bringing wood and water, and pitching the tent, while

Tom was preparing the meal, Jack and I separately rambled off to do a little exploring of our immediate neighborhood. In doing so I found a prairie ravine, not far from our camp, in which there was considerable standing water at a distance of about three hundred yards from the timber on Walnut Creek. I wondered at this water, but on following the ravine down to the creek I discovered a beaver dam built across the creek, in which a number of the dome-shaped huts were standing, and saw other evidences of the presence of a populous colony of these industrious animals. The water I had seen up the ravine was backwater caused by the dam.

At Tom's call of "grub pile" I hurried back to camp to acquaint my comrades with my discovery, only to learn that Jack had found the beaver dam before I had and, having rushed back to the wagon; was now busy getting out our steel traps preparatory to setting them for beaver.

As we sat around the mess-chest eating, Tom, between mouthfuls, explained his ideas about the establishing of our winter camp.

"This big timber here is in the right place to shelter us from the northwest winds. We must also remember that we've got to protect ourselves and stock against a surprise by hostile Injuns. I ain't looking for trouble of that kind, but it's always best to be prepared for such emergencies. So I think it'll be best to move out to the bank

of that ravine Peck spoke about, say two or three hundred yards from the timber, which will still furnish us good protection from the northwesters. In case of hostilities the water in the ravine can't be cut off from us. Into the banks of that ravine we'll dig our dugouts—one for ourselves, on one side, and a stable for the stock on the other side, opposite and facing each other. We'll cut and split some slabs in the timber and lay a sort of a floor across the ravine, for a gangway, and it'll be as handy as a pocket in a shirt.

"Now, Peck, while Jack goes to set his traps for beaver, suppose you saddle up Black Prince and go out and kill a buffalo calf or yearling and bring in a quarter or so of fresh meat. And, as there's plenty of time yet before night, while you're at it you may as well make a complete circuit of the camp, say about a mile or two out, and see if there's anybody or any sign of anybody in this neighborhood besides ourselves."

"Tom," I said, "I believe it would be better for me to go out and kill a yearling first and bring in some meat and then take a ride around the country afterward; for if I kill the yearling first and leave the carcass till I make the circuit of the camp the wolves will get away with the meat before I get back to it; and if I make the round first before killing our meat I'll be scaring all the near buffalo away."

"You're right," replied the old man; "do as

you say. I'm glad to see that you do a little thinking of your own once in a while."

"And I believe I can kill two birds with one stone," I continued, "by taking some strychnine along and baiting the remains of the yearling after I cut off the hind quarters, and in the morning I'll have a few coyotes to skin to give us a start in business."

"That's a good idea, too; but don't fool away too much time, for I want you to make that round of the neighborhood before night."

As I got our package of strychnine out of the wagon, opened it, and took out one of the phials to put in my pocket, Tom suggested:

"You'd better open that bottle here an' put in a little water to dissolve the crystals; you'll find it's easier to handle in liquid than in crystals, and also more savin'."

Tom's suggestion was a good one and I did as he advised. Then hanging the hatchet and field-glass to my saddle, I mounted and rode away.

Crossing the creek just below the beaver dam, where Jack was already looking out locations for his traps, I rode through the timber to look for the most convenient band of buffalo, and espied one that suited my purpose about a mile down the prairie bottom, strung out in single file on the trail, coming in to the creek for water.

Recrossing the creek so as to keep out of their sight behind the timber, I rode down to a point

that would intercept them and prepared to await my game. The place I had chosen to wait for them was an old buffalo crossing, the converging trails, deeply worn in the banks on either side, showing that it was much used. They would have to pass me here, and, again recrossing the creek to the north side, I rode down into the timber, tied my horse behind some bushes, and returned afoot to the crossing, being careful not to give the buffalo my wind.

Soon they passed me, went on down, drank, and climbed the hills on the other side of the stream. As the young cattle filed past me I selected a yearling and, as he came opposite, shot him, and he dropped dead in the trail. The rest gave a jump or two and went on. I cut off the hind quarters and with some trouble put them on Prince.

Then stripping back the skin from the fore quarters, I applied my solution of strychnine, a few drops here and there over the meat and entrails, and left them for wolf bait.

Having left my meat at camp, I rode away on my scout, reaching camp again about sunset.

Just after we finished supper the howling of a pack of coyotes—which we seldom noticed—prompted me to exclaim:

"Make the most of your time, my lads, for if you happen to scent that bait I put out for you I'll be skinning some of you in the morning."

The howling and barking of wolves was such

familiar music to us that it seldom provoked remark, for we had scarcely passed a night since entering the buffalo range that we had not been serenaded by the shrill, discordant notes of the coyote, varied occasionally by the deeper bass of the big, gray buffalo wolves, or "lobos," as the Mexicans call them.

Next morning Jack and I hurried through the work of watering and changing the animals to fresh grass, while Tom prepared breakfast. We were impatient to be off, and after the meal, taking our rifles in addition to revolvers, we started out to our respective tasks, Jack afoot and I on Black Prince.

As I approached my wolf baits I disturbed a couple of coyotes—probably late comers that had but recently found the carcass, for they certainly gave no evidence of the effects of strychnine as they loped off on the prairie a little way and there sat on their haunches licking their chops and watching me as though reluctant to leave their feast.

I tied Prince a few rods away from the bait, of which but little remained, while I walked about through the tall grass, looking up the dead wolves, three of which I noticed lying by the bait before dismounting. On looking about I found five more, at varying distances from the carcass, none of them more than a hundred yards away. Some of them were still warm.

I put down the rifle, drew my knife, and went to work. Having had considerable experience in skinning wolves, I was quite expert at it and soon had the eight pelts stripped off the dead coyotes and rolled up together ready for tying on behind my saddle.

The process of skinning was simple. I turned the wolf on his back and with the point of my knife split the skin from the point of the chin down the throat and belly to the root of the tail; then split the inside of each leg from the foot to an intersection of the first, or belly cut; then stripped back the skin from belly, legs, and sides. The tail was then slipped off the bone whole, without splitting, in this way: strip the skin of the tail away from the bone for about an inch at the root; then slip a split stick over the bone, take an end of the stick in each hand, clamping the bone tightly, and give a jerk toward the end of the tail. The bone slips out of its skin as if it were greased.

When it came to tying the skins on behind the saddle, Prince objected very strongly, and I was compelled to blindfold him before I could accomplish the job. After I had mounted, Prince was still nervous, but by coaxing and talking kindly to him I soon got him reconciled to carrying the burden.

When I reached camp I found Jack jubilating over three fine beavers which he had carried up

from the creek. He was grumbling because he had not put out more traps.

"Time enough," said Tom consolingly. "We've now found out that there's plenty of 'em there and can wait awhile. Their fur'll be getting heavier an' better all the time."

He and Jack were finishing skinning the third one as I dismounted and threw down my batch of coyote pelts.

"How many did you get?" asked Jack.

"Only eight," I replied. "If I'd had time to have killed and poisoned three or four buffalo in different directions out around camp I'd 'a' got as many as the horse could carry."

"Time enough for the wolves, too, by and by," said Tom.

"Now, men," said Tom after we had discussed beaver and how to catch them, "while you were out I went over to the ravine and found a good place for our dugouts and measured and staked off the ground where we'll dig 'em. After dinner we can move camp over there close to the work. And while I'm getting the grub ready you two can water the horses and mules and be a-making a lot of little pins to peg your skins down to dry."

After dinner we moved camp close to the bank of the ravine, where Tom had marked out the ground for our winter quarters. On the opposite bank he had staked out a site for a larger dugout for a stable. The ravine here was narrow, and

by a good jump we could clear the water that occupied its bottom. On top of the banks the ground for some distance around was smooth and level, bearing no other vegetation but the short, nutritious buffalo-grass.

Pitching our tent in a convenient place for our work, we turned out the stock, picketing the gray mare and Prince. Tom was to ride the "buck-skin" bronco to look for a hay-field.

Jack and I soon had our coyote and beaver pelts stretched and pegged down on a smooth piece of ground.

"I'll try to get back," said Tom as he mounted Vinegar, "in time for you men to go and put out your baits for the night; and in the meantime, while you're resting, you may as well get out the pick and shovel and turn yourselves loose on them dugouts, just to see if you've forgot how to work. You'd better begin on the horses' stable and we'll try to finish that up first, for if a "norther" should catch us the stock'd be in a bad fix for shelter, while our tent'd shelter us, all right."

In a couple of hours Tom returned, reporting that he had found, in a bend of the creek just below us, a large bottom that would afford us all the hay we would want.

"Now, men," he said as he unsaddled and turned out the bronco, "we've got lots to do that's pressing us, and, as the wolf poisoning and beaver trapping ain't pressing and won't suffer

any loss by waiting a few days, I've been thinking that we'd better let the pelts go for a while and put in all our time at haymaking and digging till we get everything made snug for cold weather."

Tom's suggestion seemed so reasonable that we agreed with him and decided to let the pelts alone for a while.

Tom got his scythe out of the wagon and "hung" it and then went down to the timber to make a couple of wooden hay-forks. When he had returned from the timber with his wooden forks he remarked as he sat down and began whittling the prongs to points and otherwise smoothing them up with his knife:

"While I was at it I cut a lot of poles for a hay frame to put on top of the wagon-box to haul hay on; and I also cut some poles to lay on the ground under our freight when we unload the wagon."

Later in the day we unloaded the wagon, piling the contents on the poles inside the sideboards, which we had taken off together, leaving the bows on them. After the goods were thus piled up the wagon-sheet was stretched over the bows and securely tied down and the load was thus protected from the weather.

Tired and very hungry after our hard day's work, we devoured our supper and, after agreeing to devote the next day to digging and haymaking, were soon sound asleep.

After breakfast next morning Tom shouldered the scythe and his rifle and set out for the hay-field.

When we had cleared away the breakfast dishes Jack chose the pick-and-shovel work and was soon making the dirt fly out of the hole on the other side of the ravine, while I set to making a hay frame of crossed poles on top of the wagon-box, notched and lashed together and held in place by strips of rawhide cut from the skin on the yearling buffalo quarters. Now and then on the still morning air, although about a mile away, we could hear the "whick-whack" as Tom whetted his scythe.

At nine o'clock Jack went to the hay-field to help Tom, while I put on the dinner, to which I called them by flag at noon. In the afternoon they returned to their haymaking, and by evening they had a nice lot of hay in cocks which would do to haul and stack next day. After finishing the hay frame I worked at digging in the dugout.

Buffalo were to be seen on the prairie all about us, and now and then a few antelope made their appearance, but we were too busy to spare the time to go out and kill any. Flocks of water-fowl—wild geese, brants, ducks, and sand-hill cranes—were seen and heard flying over and sometimes alighted in the pond formed by the beaver dam, and also seemed to come down at a

point several miles down the creek, which indicated that there was a body of water there.

In the evening when the men had returned from the hay-field we all stood for a while looking down the valley and remarking on the appearance of civilization imparted to the scene by the distant flat dotted over with cocks of hay. But in the morning at daylight, on again looking in that direction, we were filled with indignation to see that during the night a herd of buffalo had preempted our hay-field and had trampled, horned, and scattered all the nice cocks in every direction, and were now bedded on the ground, probably chewing their cuds in total indifference to our rights after almost destroying the previous day's work of our haymakers.

"I'll make wolf bait of one of 'em for spite, so I will," said Jack as he seized a rifle and started down the hollow to get a shot.

"Don't kill more'n one, Jack, just enough to scare them off," suggested Tom as the irate Irishman sneaked off down the ravine, "for we don't want our hay ground littered up with dead buffalo and dead wolf carcasses."

For some minutes Tom and I stood watching the buffalo to see what the Irishman would do for them. They were all lying down in apparent perfect contentment except one large bull. We kept our eyes on the big bull and after a time saw the huge beast drop, and immediately afterward the

report of the rifle reached our ears. The rest of the buffalo jumped to their feet in alarm at the sound of the shot, but, instead of running away, stood staring at the timber from whence Jack had fired; and had he desired to do so he could probably have remained in concealment and shot several more, for the buffalo do not readily take the hint of danger till they can see the enemy. Presently we saw the herd stampede, and at the same time our Irishman made his appearance, running out of the timber shouting and firing another shot over them to give them a good scare.

"Our hay's ruined entirely," he said as he put away his rifle and sat down to breakfast, "scattered all about and tramped over. Even what we left in the windrows is all horned and tossed about. We may be able to rake up some of it, but it'll be hardly worth the effort. But I took me satisfaction out of that big fellow—I got a good broadside shot at him and must have shot him through the heart, for he dropped in his tracks. Peck had better go down there this evening and put some poison on the carcass, and be taking a few wolf pelts, too, while we're a-haymaking."

"Well," said Tom, "we'll have to stand these night-prowling buffalo off some way, and I think the best way will be for Peck to mount one of the horses just before night and ride 'round the neighborhood and drive off any herds that seem to be heading toward our hay-field. I wouldn't kill

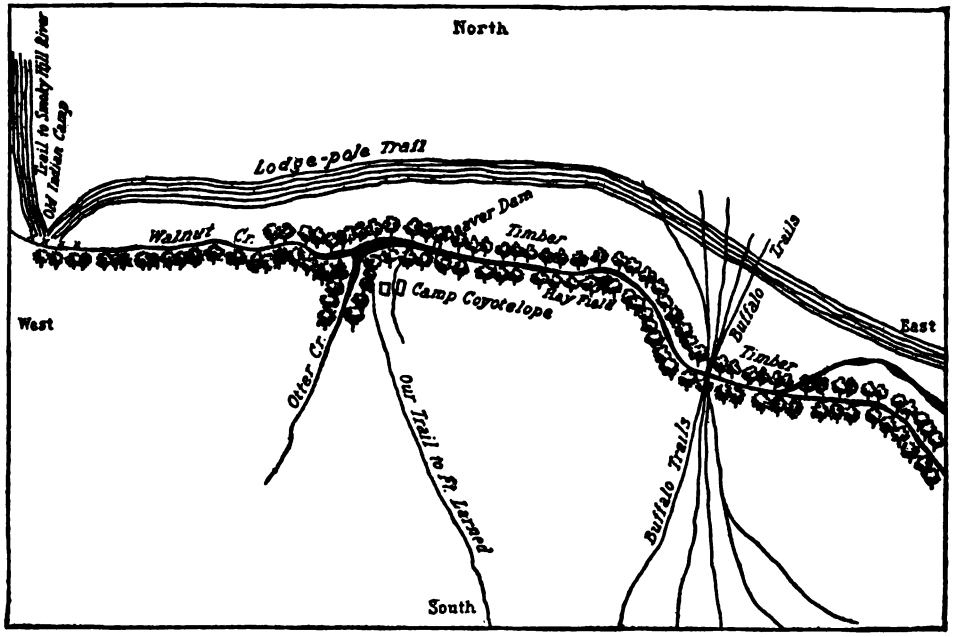
any more of them at present, for we can't spare the time to do much wolf skinning, but just stampede them and stand them off for a few days till we get our hay cut and hauled; then you may go for them, and the wolves, too. We don't often have occasion to take the hide off a buffalo, but I've been thinking it would be a good scheme to skin a few of the first ones we kill till we get hides enough to lay over the timbers on top of our dugouts before we throw the dirt on, to keep the fine dirt from sifting down on the inside; so, Peck, you may as well take the hide off this one and bring it up to camp when you go down there to poison the meat for wolf bait.

"While Jack and I are mowing to-day you can look out a suitable place along up the ravine here above camp where we can make a crossing, and dig down the banks a little, throwing the dirt into the hollow so's we can cross the wagon over; and while we're hauling hay we'll just leave the wagon over on the other side of the draw. We'll stack the hay, as we haul it, on the bank, close up to the stable so's it'll be handy.

"And, mind you, that at no time and under no circumstances must the camp guard leave camp."

"Have you seen any fresh signs, Tom, that make you think there's Indians about?" I asked.

"Not a thing, but I want to keep you 'minded with the idea that in this country 'eternal vigilance is the price of life, liberty, and the pursuit



Camp of the Wolf Hunters

of happiness,' as the Bible says. We know how tricky Injuns are, and, although we've seen no fresh signs, a prowling party is likely to drop onto us any time; and just think what a fix we'd be in if they should happen to get into our camp and all hands away. How completely they'd have the drop on us! I'm not scared of them, nor trying to scare you, but we've got to keep our eyes peeled and be prepared all the time."

"All right," I replied with an air of more confidence than I really felt, "I guess Found and I will be able to take care of camp."

"Of course," continued Tom reassuringly, "all Injuns ain't hostile, but we've got to keep on the safe side; and if a party of them approaches our camp at any time, even if they profess to be friendly, we must stand them off and never allow more than a few—just what we feel sure we can handle—to come into camp at a time; and even then, always keep your eyes on them and your arms and cartridges handy."

Leaving me with these cheerful subjects for thought, the two men proceeded to their work.

After they left I moved our horses and mules across the ravine where the dog and I could guard them on one side, while on the other the two haymakers would be some protection. During the forenoon I worked at the banks of the gulch, a little above our tent, to make a crossing for the wagon.

In searching for the place for a crossing for the wagon I discovered a little spring of water trickling out of the bank a few steps above our dugouts. It was only a weak vein, but by digging a pit under it, in which we planted an empty barrel, we made a reservoir that furnished us an abundance of good water.

The discovery and improvement of this little spring made our camp an ideal one. At first we had expected to use backwater from the beaver dam, but we soon realized that the trash from our camp might render this water unfit for drinking and cooking; and but for finding the spring we should have been obliged to carry water from the creek, which would have been laborious and inconvenient.

When an occasional rain or melting snow flushed out the trash in the ravine we could use that water for our stock for a few days, but at other times we watered them at the creek.

I felt more confidence in the protection afforded by our shepherd dog than in all the measures we were taking for the safety of our outfit. With the natural instinct of his breed, Found spent most of his time out with the stock, always selecting a position on some elevation between our animals and camp where he could see all that was going on in our neighborhood; and I was satisfied that neither friend nor foe could approach without his giving notice.

At noon when the men came in to dinner they reported that they had raked up a good load of the hay that had been scattered, and in the afternoon they took the mules and wagon with them and Tom brought the first load to camp on returning in the evening, while Jack remained and began skinning the dead buffalo. When I joined him we soon stripped the hide off, applied the strychnine to the carcass, and left it for the wolves.

"First come, first served, will be the rule here to-night," I remarked as we started to camp. "The first wolves to reach the bait will probably get laid out before they have time to get half a feed, while those that come later may not get strychnine enough to give them a bellyache."

"How many do you expect to find in the morning?" asked Jack.

"Oh, about eight or ten for the first night will be a pretty fair haul; but by to-morrow night I'll poison the bait again, and by that time it ought to catch more—maybe as many as twelve or fifteen—for the scent of the dead buffalo will then attract them from a greater distance."

I did even better than I anticipated, for next morning I found thirteen dead wolves lying around the bait awaiting my skinning knife. Jack remained in camp until I had skinned the wolves, brought in the pelts and pegged them down to dry, after which he took the team and went out to the hay-field where Tom was mowing.

The dead buffalo only lasted for three nights' baiting, by which time I had taken nearly fifty pelts, some big gray wolves but mostly coyotes and little yellow foxes. We killed no more buffalo for wolf baits until the more important work was done.

Our haymakers were now making a good showing, bringing in and stacking a load at noon and another at night, and in a week we had stacked as much hay as we should need.

While doing duty as camp guard, I had put in all my spare time throwing dirt out of our stable dugout and had the excavation about completed. While Jack and I were doing a little trimming up inside and cutting a doorway through the wall of dirt on the side next the ravine, Tom had gone into the timber and cut and split a lot of poles and slabs to support the roof of dirt.

First putting a small log, twenty-four feet long, on the brink of each side of the excavation, to serve as "plates" to rest the roof timbers on, we then laid twelve-foot slabs and poles across from side to side, as closely as they would fit, covering the larger crevices with brush.

"Now," said Tom, stepping back to take an observation of our work when we had reached this point, "ef we had buffalo-skins enough to cover it, to keep the fine dirt from sifting through, we'd be ready to go to throwing the dirt on an' soon have the horses' stable finished up so's we could go to work on our own quarters."

"Well, we can soon get them," I replied. "In the morning Jack and I will go out and kill a few buffalo and bring in the hides, and by to-morrow night we can have this dugout about completed."

Next morning the Irishman and I saddled up and started out to secure the hides. We could have killed what we needed out of the first band we struck, but, as I wished to use the carcasses for wolf baits, we decided to distribute the baits at different points about the camp and not less than a mile from it.

We killed and skinned six bulls, making a complete circuit of our camp, and by noon had returned with the hides.

After dinner we spread enough of them over the roof timbers to completely cover them and then set to work shovelling on the dirt, making quite a mound of it. This finished our stable, except for the mangers and feed-boxes inside and making a door of some kind to close up the opening we had cut through the bank. This last Tom made next day by a frame of poles on which was tacked a buffalo-hide. This door was hung on rawhide hinges.

"Now, men," said the old man as we topped out the dirt roof and smoothed it up, "we've a snug shelter here for our stock in case of need, but, of course, we won't put 'em into it till we have to. As long as it's fair they'll do better out on the buffalo-grass, as they've been doing. Our

stable, hay, an' grain will be our reserve for stormy weather or when the grass is covered with snow. We must still work hard till we get our own winter quarters finished up, an' then let the weather turn loose—we'll be ready for it."

Toward evening I made the round of the buffalo carcasses and poisoned them for the night's catch of wolves.

As we gathered around the supper table in the evening I suggested:

"As I expect a big job of wolf skinning in the morning, I guess I'll need help, and maybe I had as well take Jack along with me and be breaking him in."

"All right," replied the Irishman, "if Tom says so, I'm your huckleberry. How many skins are you going to get this haul?"

"Well, I don't know, but, putting it low, I ought to find at least five or six around each bait, and maybe twice that many, so you see, skinning, bringing in, and pegging down thirty-five or forty wolf pelts is no small job."

"Well, it'll take the two of you the whole forenoon," said Tom ruefully, "but the wolfskins must be taken care of—that's what we're here for. Still, I'm mighty anxious to get the other dugout done, so I guess you'd better not kill any more buffalo for bait unless we need some more of their skins to cover our dugout. These six will keep you a-poisoning and a-skinning for at least three

or four days to come, and all of that time there'll not be much done on the dugout, for part of my time'll be taken up doing the cooking an' camp work. But go ahead with your wolf killing, for every pelt cured is as good as six bits or a dollar in pocket at the least calculation."

After an early breakfast next morning Jack and I mounted and started. We found fully as big a job as I had anticipated, for the night's catch yielded us over fifty wolfskins. It took us most of the morning, brisk work, to get them all gathered in, and our horses were so well loaded with the hides that we had to walk and lead them back to camp. Jack proved an apt pupil at wolf skinning and soon could snatch a hide off as quickly as I.

When we reached camp with our loads we found that Tom, with his usual foresight, had whittled us out a good lot of pegs, which greatly assisted us in disposing of the pelts, and we soon had them stretched and pegged down, flesh side up, on a smooth piece of ground near the tent where we had already started a drying yard.

Each evening, while there was anything left for a wolf bait of the buffalo we had recently killed, I made the round, poisoning the flesh, and next morning Jack and I visited the baits, skinned the dead wolves, brought in the pelts, and pegged them down. This generally "spoiled" the forenoon, while the afternoon would be spent in dig-

ging our dugout; but, as our winter quarters were to be only about half the size of the stable, we soon had the new excavation finished.

After putting the roof timbers on our dugout we placed the stove in its corner, put on the extra joints of pipe provided for the purpose, extending it up through an opening in the slabs, and plastered a lot of mud around the pipe to prevent it setting fire to the timbers. Then spreading buffalo-hides over the timbers, we heaped up the earth on it, as we had on the other one, and our winter residence was ready for its furniture and tenants.

Our ten-foot-square room was rather cramped quarters to hold us and all that we had designed to put in it, and we found it necessary still to use the tent to store such of our plunder as would not need protection from the cold.

Without giving any reason, Tom insisted on moving the tent up as close against the rear side of the pile of dirt that constituted the roof of our dugout as we could get it. I suspected then that this was one of his strategic plans, and a few days later my surmise was verified when we found him at work digging a tunnel from the dugout room to the centre of the tent. By this underground connection we could go from one place to the other without being exposed and, if necessary, could use the tent as a lookout station.

On the evening that we moved into the dugout,

as we sat down to our first meal in winter quarters, Tom remarked with evident satisfaction:

"Now, men, we've got things in shape so that we're ready for a cold snap, snow-storm, or norther ef one chances to come this way. From now on we can take it easier. There will be a lot of trimming an' tidying up to do about camp yet for several days, an' while I'm putting on the finishing touches you two can light out and go to poisoning wolves an' trapping beaver or hunting any other game that you can find. You ought to explore the neighborhood for ten or twelve miles around in every direction. It's about time, too, for one of us to take a trip over to the fort to get our mail an' find out what's going on in the world."

"Well, Tom, what are the orders for to-morrow?" said I.

"Why, you an' Jack had better go out an' kill a few more buffalo for baits an' Jack can set his traps for some more beaver. You might both of you ride up or down the creek for a few miles now and then, to learn the country like an' maybe pick up an antelope or some wild geese or ducks, to make a change in our bill of fare. An' about to-morrow or next day or the day after, when I get things pretty well shaped up about camp, I think I'll ride over to the fort an' get our mail an' see what's going on in the United States."

"In a little while," remarked Jack, "if our luck

holds out, we'll be gettin' a big lot of wolfskins dried. How are we going to stow 'em away to take care of 'em till spring?"

"Well," replied Tom, "in a few days I'll rig up a lever to press 'em with, an' then as fast as we get a hundred or so dried we'll put fifty of 'em in a pile, press 'em down tight, an' tie 'em in bales with rawhide strips an' then store the bales away in the tent."

CHAPTER XIII

KILLED BY THE INDIANS

FOR the next few days we were all very busy. Tom was putting the finishing touches on our quarters, while Jack and I were doing the trapping, baiting, and skinning. I assisted Jack in trapping beaver and he helped me in killing buffalo and taking care of the wolfskins.

While working at these tasks we were riding the surrounding country, east and west, up and down the creek, and north and south in open prairie. At a distance of about three miles down the creek, on the north side, we found a series of connected sloughs leading off from the creek out into the prairie bottom, through which a string of little ponds ran for about a mile and then united with the main stream again.

These sloughs, bordered by a rank growth of rushes, made excellent feeding-grounds for water-fowl. It was easy here to procure all the ducks, geese, brant, and sand-hill cranes that we wished. On the prairie were plenty of antelope, with now and then a few deer and elk in the timber along the creek. Everywhere were seen bleached and bleaching buffalo bones—too common a feature of the landscape to attract more than a passing glance.

One day Jack and I had been killing some buffalo for wolf baits on the high prairie south of our camp. We had become separated by a couple of miles; each had killed his buffalo, and I had poisoned mine and started to Jack, who was waiting for me to prepare his buffalo for the wolves also. As I rode through a scattered lot of bones, where several animals seemed to have been killed together, I noticed among the lot a human skull. Looking more closely, I saw other human bones of the same skeleton and those of a horse, the hoofs of which, with the shoes still on, showed that it had not been an Indian's horse. Bones of wolves lay among the others.

Here, then, seemed the evidences of a past tragedy, and, wishing to have Jack come and help to read the signs, I rode out clear of this boneyard, fired a shot from my rifle to attract his attention, and then began riding around in a circle—the usual signal in such cases—to call him to me.

He understood and galloped toward me. While he was coming I walked about among the relics, trying to solve the mystery of which these bones were the record. They had been somewhat scattered, by the wolves that had picked them, but their general lay indicated pretty clearly the relative situation of the man and animals at the time of their death. The bones had probably not been there more than about a year.

Although somewhat mixed and scattered, the

general lay of the bones seemed to show the buffalo on one side, the horse on the other, and the man between them. The man's skull had a small bullet hole through it at the temples, which sufficiently indicated the immediate cause of his death; but whether this shot had come from an enemy or had been self-inflicted could not be determined by the signs.

While thus trying to interpret the indications, Jack reached me.

"Here, Jack, has been a man, horse, and buffalo killed," I said as he halted, "and from the looks of things, I think it happened about a year ago. Help me to read the signs. The horse was a white man's horse, for the hoofs, you see, have shoes on."

"That ain't sure proof," replied he, "for the horse might have been lately captured or stolen from the whites. But, hold on!" he exclaimed after a moment's survey of the bone-yard, as, stooping, he picked up what proved to be the lower jaw-bone of the human skull. "This settles it. This says he was a white man, for here's a gold plug in one tooth."

"Well, that settles one important point," I replied. "But how did the buffalo, man, and horse happen to die so close together?"

"Seems to me," said Jack, still walking about scrutinizing the relics, "it could have happened in only one or two ways. Either the man and his

horse have been killed by a wounded bull, an' the bull then fell an' died with 'em, or—which is more likely—the man killed the buffalo an', while busy cutting some of the meat out, was corralled by Injuns. How do you read it?"

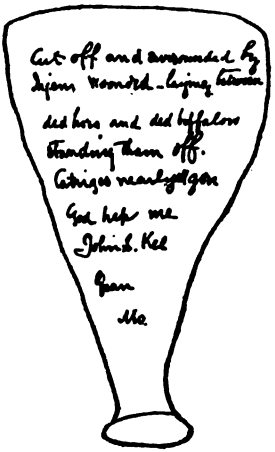
"The signs disprove your first proposition, Jack," I answered, "but confirm the second. If it had been an accident from a wounded bull there would be some such remains as the metallic parts of his gun or pistol, or buttons, spurs, buckles, and so forth; but you see there's not a thing of that kind to be seen. If he was killed by Indians they would have carried off all his and his horse's equipments; and I think that is what happened."

"I guess you're right," admitted Jack. "It must have been the work of Injuns."

Just then he stopped and picked up an old bleached buffalo shoulder-blade that seemed to have been carefully placed, flat side down, on top of the weather-whitened skull of the older set of bones. "Halloo! what's this?" he exclaimed excitedly as he began scanning the bone. "Here it is, Peck. This'll tell us something about it if we can only make out the writing. See if you can make it out."

On the flat side of the shoulder-blade was dimly pencilled a partially obliterated and nervously written inscription. It was without date, and yet enough of the wording was legible to enable

us to make out the following message from the dead man:



Cut off and surrounded by Injens Woonded—laying between ded hors and ded buffalow standing them off. Catriges nearly all gon God hep me
John S. Kel Gran Mo.

The name seemed to be something like Kelton, Kelsey, or Kelley, and several of the other words were so imperfectly written that I had to guess them out. We guessed the name of the town to be Granby, Missouri.

As I finished rendering my interpretation of the inscription Jack said, as he devoutly crossed himself:

"'God help me!' the poor fellow said, an' no doubt the Good Man took pity on him an' let

"It must have been the work of Injuns."

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him in at the gate, for the good Book do tell us that he never was known to go back on such a prayer as that. Well, he must have hurted some of them Injuns in the row. It would be a satisfaction to find some sign that he got away with some of 'em; so let's mount an' take a circuit 'round over the prairie for two or three hundred yards out an' see if we can find anything."

We did so and were rewarded by finding the bones of two small horses, probably Indian ponies that the man had shot in defending his position.

"That's some satisfaction," said Jack as we returned, "for it's more'n likely that he killed some of the Injuns, too. Well, what'll we do with these things?" pointing to the skull, jaw-bone, and buffalo shoulder-blade.

"I was thinking of taking them back to camp with us," I replied, "to see what Tom will say."

"Just what I was thinkin'," said Jack, dismounting and preparing to tie the skull and jaw-bone to his saddle. "I'll carry these an' you can carry the shoulder-blade. You'd better carry it in your hand, an' be careful of it so's not to rub out the writin' any more, for it's hard enough to make out as it is."

Of course Tom was interested in the memorials we brought and asked us many questions about the signs we had found.

After giving him time to study the problem out, I asked:

"Well, Tom, what do you make of it?"

"It's my guess," he replied deliberately, holding the skull up before him as though reading its history, "that this man was a wolf hunter, like ourselves, an' if so there'll be more of this affair to be discovered hereabouts. He had killed that buffalo for wolf bait, 'cause if he'd been after meat he'd 'a' killed a younger one, or a cow, for you say the bones showed it was a big bull. A man wouldn't be so far away from the Santa Fé road huntin' buffalo without he had a camp in this neighborhood. If he had a camp he's had a pardner or two, an' what must have become of them? Their camp must have been somewheres along the creek, not far from here. Have either of you seen any signs of such a layout in your rambles up or down the creek?"

"No," I answered, "but, then, neither of us has been more than about three miles up or down."

"Well, after this, when you go up or down the creek make your trips extend a little farther each time till you've covered at least ten or twelve miles each way; an' by keeping your eyes peeled you may be able to find some remains of a hunter's camp or some sign that'll give us something more about this. This man came to his death about as you an' Jack guessed it; that is, while getting ready to poison his buffalo for wolf bait the Injuns came onto him an' surrounded him."

"I think," I interrupted him to say, "that he

had probably already poisoned the buffalo, for I noticed the bones of several wolves there, which would go to show that the wolves had died from eating the poisoned meat of the buffalo."

"Well, yes—likely," returned Tom. "He put up a good fight, though, from what you say, an' seems to have been a man that's had some previous experience in that line. Did you notice any bullet hole in his horse's skull?"

"No. I looked for that, but there was no sign that the horse had been shot in the head; but he might have been shot elsewhere."

"'Tain't likely," replied the old man thoughtfully, "for you say the horse's bones show that he died close to the buffalo, an' the man in between 'em, as his bones show an' the writing on the shoulder-blade says. He must have cut its throat. How far off from the man's bones was the bones of the Injun ponies that you found?"

"About three hundred yards," I replied.

"Well, he must have had a Sharp's rifle,* for a muzzle-loader wouldn't kill that far. But he's

* There were no metallic cartridge shells in use in those days, the cartridges for Sharp's rifles and all firearms being put up in paper. The Sharp's rifle carbine, which was one of the earliest breech-loaders brought into use on the frontier, had been adopted by the government for the cavalry service and was also a favorite buffalo gun among frontiersmen generally. Their extreme effective range was eight hundred yards, the longest-range guns then in use on the plains. The Colt's navy pistols we used then would shoot with the force and accuracy of a rifle for about three hundred yards. I remember seeing a sergeant in the Second Dragoons kill an antelope one day with a Colt's navy (taking a dead rest) at a distance of three hundred paces. The regulation "pace" is thirty inches.

had a navy pistol, too, for this shot he give himself was a navy ball."

And taking a navy bullet out of his pocket, Tom showed us that it would just fit the hole in the skull.

"He's been right-handed, too," continued the old man, "for the ball went in on the right side an' come out on the left. You see, the little hole is clean-cut on the right side but bigger an' ragged on the left where it come out. That tells where it went in an' where it come out. When he wrote that note on the old shoulder-blade he's been getting nervous, or maybe weak from loss of blood. It's a pity, though, that he didn't set down his name an' the town where he come from a little plainer so's we could write to his folks an' let 'em know what become of him. But, like many another poor devil that's been wiped out by Injuns, his people'll never know where, when, or how he died.

"Well," continued the old man after a pause, "I b'lieve I'll ride over to the fort to-morrow; an' get our mail an' come back next day, an' I guess I'll just take them things along," pointing to the bones, "an' maybe some o' the folks over there can tell me somethin' more about this affair. If anybody knows anything about it French Dave'll know, for he's been among the Injuns a good deal an' would be likely to have heard something about it."

CHAPTER XIV

SATANTA'S STORY

NEXT day, mounted on Black Prince, Tom started for Fort Larned. He had stowed the skull of the supposed deceased wolf hunter in a gunny sack tied to his saddle, but the buffalo shoulder-blade he wrapped carefully in the fur of a fox skin, to make sure that no chafing should further obliterate the already obscure record.

These relics he intended to submit to the best sign readers to be found about the fort, to ascertain if any light could be thrown on the supposed tragedy.

As I was writing a letter to send in by Tom, Jack remarked: "We ought to have a name for our camp, a place to date letters from, something more than just 'Camp on Walnut Creek.'"

"That wouldn't be a bad idea," I replied, "but what shall we call it? The only things we see here are buffaloes, coyotes, and antelopes, with a few prairie-dogs and rattlesnakes. How would it do to call our place 'Camp Antelope'?"

"I think it would be more to the point," said Jack, "to call it 'Camp Coyote.'"

"Well," said Tom, "why not compromise and call it 'Camp Coyotelope'?"

"Let it be so," said I, and I so dated my letter, and from that time on we spoke of our winter home as Camp Coyotelope.

Nothing unusual happened while Tom was gone. Jack tended his traps, while I did the wolf baiting and skinning.

On the second evening, just in time for supper, Tom returned from Fort Larned, bringing our mail, and as we gathered around the table we asked him anxiously what he had learned about the dead man.

"A whole lot," replied the old man between mouthfuls, "an' not just what I wanted to find out, either. None of 'em could make out the man's name or where he come from any nigher than we did. I went right to the adjutant's office, where I found several of the officers, an' when I brought out the bones an' told 'em the story they became interested. One officer had heard something about a party of hunters being wiped out by the Injuns about a year ago, but he didn't know the particulars. That writing on the old shoulder-blade attracted 'em most, an' each one had to take it an' examine it. But they couldn't make it out.

"I suggested to the adjutant that maybe French Dave might know something, an' he sent an orderly for Dave right away, an', sure enough, the ol' French-Canadian did know something.

"Ol' Dave asked me: 'Where you find 'em?'

An' then I told him all I knew about the matter, an' what the signs seemed to show, an' read to him the writing on the shoulder-blade, for Dave can neither read nor write. He studied awhile an' then said: 'Yes—mus' be same lot. I know 'bout yother two. See 'em bones where Injuns kill 'em. No see this one bones, but Satanta tell me 'bout it one day. Mus' be same one.'

"The story of the affair," continued Tom, "as I gathered it from Dave, is about thisaway: Three wolf hunters with a wagon an' team had established their camp on Walnut Creek, an' from what Dave says the remains of that camp an' the bones of two of the men must be down the creek from here about five miles, on the same side we are on.

"These wolf hunters had just fairly got established when Satanta an' about twenty of his men come along, one day, just in time to see this fellow, whose bones you found, a-starting off on the prairie to kill a buffalo an' poison it for wolves. The Injuns hadn't been seen by the white men, an' after this one was gone Satanta kept his men out of sight of the wolf hunters, all except one besides himself, an' him an' this one rode out in sight of the white men an' made signs of friendship, an' the wolf hunters let 'em come into their camp. After begging some grub from the white men the two Injuns made themselves very agreeable an' friendly, an' by and by a few more of the Kiowas dropped along an' was allowed to come

into the camp; for I s'pose they seemed so friendly that the white men thought it wouldn't look neighborly to show any suspicion of such good Injuns.

"Satanta told Dave, bragging how slick he worked it, that when he got these wolf hunters in a proper frame of mind an' saw that the sign was right, he give the word, an' they turned loose and killed the two men before they had time to realize the trap they'd got into.

"Then, after plundering the camp, a warrior called Lame Deer took six others an' started off to follow up an' take in the man they'd seen going away, for fear that he might somehow get wind of the affair before coming back to camp and get away.

"They overtook him, so Satanta told Dave, just after the man had killed a buffalo, skinned part of the hide back, an', as the Injuns supposed, was about to cut out some o' the hump steak; an', just as we made it out by the signs, the man, seeing the desperate fix he was in, had cut his horse's throat to make a breastwork of his carcass on one side, an', with the buffalo on the other, had got down between 'em an' give the Injuns a rattlin' good fight, killin' one Kiowa, badly woundin' another, an' killin' the two ponies you found the bones of.

"But they got him at last—at least he killed himself when he was down to his last cartridge—an' then they piled onto him an' stripped every

stitch of clothes off his body, but, seein' that the man had committed suicide, their superstitions kept 'em from scalping him or mutilating his body.

"An', now comes a gratifying part of the proceedings, as told to Dave by Satanta, that the signs didn't reveal to us. When Lame Deer an' his party had stripped the dead man an' his horse of all their equipments an' was gittin' ready to return to Satanta's party at the hunters' camp, some of the Injuns concluded to cut out a big chunk of the hump steak of the buffalo that the white man had just stripped the hide off of an' intended to cut out the steak himself, as they s'posed.

"But it turned out that the white man had unconsciously set a death-trap for some of 'em; for he had already poisoned the skinned side of the buffalo, and when the Injuns got back to the camp an' cooked an' eat their fresh hump steak all that eat the fresh meat was poisoned, an' four of 'em kicked the bucket right there.

"Well, sir, Dave says, this so scared the rest of the Injuns that, although they had packed their ponies with a lot of the white men's provender, they were afraid to use any of the food, an' so they piled all of it into the white men's wagon an' set fire to it an' burned the whole business.

"Then, packing the bodies of their dead warriors on their ponies, they made their way back

to their main village, some miles down the creek, a little the loser in the long run, for, although they had killed the three white men an' destroyed their outfit, it had cost 'em five warriors.

"The wiping out of these wolf hunters," Tom went on, "corroborates what I've often told you, an' what your own experience ought to teach you, that it's never safe to depend on the friendship of Injuns—'specially Kiowas. Whenever they can get a good chance at a white man, or a small party of whites, they don't hesitate to murder 'em —an' 'specially a party of hunters, for that class they consider their natural enemies on account of the hunters killing what the Injuns claim to be the red man's game.

"I left them bones with the adjutant over to the fort," continued Tom, "as he thought maybe somebody might come along who could throw more light on the mystery. Then I called on Weisselbaum an' told him we were just a-gettin' under good headway poisoning wolves, trapping beaver, an' so forth, an' he offered to buy all our catch —wanted to make a bargain with me right then— but I stood him off, for I think maybe we can do better to take our skins into Leavenworth. Some of the officers wanted to know if we couldn't bring 'em over a saddle of antelope for their mess whenever one of us goes over there for our mail. I guess we can do it just as well as not an' make a little spending money on the side; an', besides, it's

always a good idea to be on good terms with the officers at the post, for we may want favors from them now an' then."

Since moving into our dugout we had found ourselves so much more cramped for room than we had been in the tent that, following Tom's suggestion and example, we had each built himself a swinging frame of poles with a buffalo-hide stretched over it on which to spread our beds. During the day we kept these hanging bunks triced up to the timbers overhead, out of the way, lowering them to within a couple of feet of the floor to sleep in after supper each evening. We found them a luxury compared with sleeping on the hard ground.

Next day, after Tom's return from the fort, Jack and I rode down the creek to look for the bones of the wolf hunters of whom French Dave had told Tom and had little difficulty in finding them, for the burnt remains of their little log cabin, on the prairie, a little way from the timber, attracted us and guided us to the spot. The bones of the two men had been scattered by the wolves, but the irons of their burnt wagon were lying just where the fire had left them.

That their camp had been established at a reasonable distance from the timber and otherwise well located in a defensive point of view showed that these men had had some knowledge of the dangers to be guarded against from hostile In-

dians and that they had probably been plainsmen of experience; but, as Tom said, their fatal error was in allowing too many Indians to come into their camp.

We were now—about the middle of December—"doing a land-office business," as Jack expressed it, in taking wolf pelts, gathering them in daily about as fast as we could take care of them. Jack was doing well also in beaver trapping, having already accumulated a lot of fine furs.

Tom had rigged up a press by means of which we put the skins into compact bales and stowed them away in the tent. The tunnel connecting the dugout and tent came up into the latter right in the centre, between the legs of the iron tripod that supported the tent-pole, and he placed the bales of skins in a close wall all around the tent, leaving an open space in the centre around the tripod, and I asked him why.

"This tent," he answered, "will be our look-out station and also our 'bomb-proof' in case of need."

"The bales of fur'll make it bullet-proof, all right," I replied, "but I don't see how we can see out after you get that bank of wolfskins piled up toward the tops of the doors."

"When we get them up that high," said Tom, "I intend to cut three or four loopholes in the canvas, about big enough to look through an' shoot out of, an' over each hole, to keep out the weather,

I'll sew a flap that can be tucked up or let down to suit circumstances."

"Great head," said Jack. "A good general was spoiled when Tom enlisted."

"'In time of peace, prepare for war,' was one of George Washington's maxims," said Tom, "an' never was more sensible advice given for either individual or nation."

Usually Jack and I did most of the hunting and scouting around over the adjacent country, but now and then Tom would strike out for a short trip up or down the creek on his own account.

One day, after being out for a short time, he came hurrying back and began to delve in the mess-chest, inquiring for a fish-hook and line that he had seen there, declaring that he had just found a lot of fresh otter tracks on the bank of the creek.

"Why, Tom," asked Jack innocently, "do they catch otter with fish-hooks?"

"No, you numskull," replied the old man impatiently, "the fish-hook and line is to catch fish to bait traps for the otter.

"Now, then, Jack," continued the old man after finding his fishing-tackle and assuring himself that it was in good condition, "come along with me down to the beaver dam, an' while I catch a fish or two for bait you pull up a couple of your beaver traps an' we'll set for otter."

"Well, I guess I can spare you a couple of traps

now," replied Jack. "I ain't catching as many beavers lately as when I first started in. I think I'm getting the herd pretty well thinned out. But I've done pretty well at trapping, for I've took some thirty odd nice beaver skins besides a few muskrats."

A few hours later the two men returned to camp after having caught some fish and baited and set the traps for otter, and next morning, taking Jack with him, Tom found, on visiting his traps and fishing them up out of the water, a fine otter fastened by a leg in each trap and drowned. Later Tom took a number of otter skins, but they were by no means as numerous as the beaver.

Black Prince, after he became accustomed to it, was a much better buffalo horse than either of the mustangs, though, when two mounted hunters went out, the buckskin bronco, Vinegar, did pretty well for that work. The gray mare, Polly, could not be brought near enough to a buffalo to be used as a hunter. Now and then Jack and I went afoot down to the slough to kill some ducks or geese. Our shepherd dog Found was a good retriever, and when we went gunning for water-fowl we generally took him along to bring ashore any birds killed on the water.

"I want to remind you men," said Tom one day, "that this fine weather we've been having can't, in the nature of things, last much longer. We're liable to have a cold rain, turning to a sleet

or snow-storm, or maybe a regular old blizzard swooping down on us now soon, an' we must be prepared for it. Our camp's in pretty good shape, but we haven't fitted ourselves out with fur caps an' mittens an' other fixings to enable us to stand the winds of winter. I propose that we put in our spare time for the next few days a-dressing some hides, an' then a-cutting out and making us a good fur cap an' pair of mittens apiece, an' something in the way of buffalo overshoes, too, to slip on over our boots, an' a wolfskin overcoat apiece.

"Now, the first thing to do is to select the hides to be used an' flesh 'em, an' then get out that package of alum that we brought along to tan 'em with an' go to dressing 'em. Those little yellow fox skins ain't worth much to sell, but they will be just the things for caps an' mittens. I've got an old buffalo robe that we can cut up for overshoes an' put rawhide soles to 'em. As for myself, I've been thinking that the next time I go over to the fort I'll see if I can find enough dressed buffalo calfskins in Weisselbaum's stock —it'll only take about six or eight—to make me an overcoat; for a buffalo calfskin overcoat is a mighty serviceable garment for winter wear."

"You're right, they are," said Jack, "but I guess me an' Peck'll have to put up with a coyote coat apiece for knockin' around here this winter, and when we get back to Leavenworth we'll have

a stylish overcoat of beaver skins put up for next winter. What do you say, Peck?"

"I'm favorable," I replied, "but, as this is a partnership business, of course we'll have to pay Tom for his interest in the beaver skins."

"Well," said the old man, "I'll balance the account with you this way. I'll make it a stand-off, if I get otter skins enough, by having me a fancy overcoat made of them."

The caps, mittens, overshoes, and coats were duly made and gave us much comfort during the storms of winter.

Game continued plenty. We often killed antelope within a few rods of our dugout and sometimes had to turn out in the night and help the dog drive a herd of buffalo out of camp.

CHAPTER XV

WILD BILL VISITS US

IN preparing for a probable blizzard we had hauled up several loads of good, dry wood and chopped much of it into stove wood, carrying it into our quarters and stowing it away in the tunnel, still leaving a passageway, however. We found that the tunnel acted as a flue and caused such a draught through our little room that we were forced to temporarily close up the opening in the tent by placing a bale of wolfskins over the hole. We now put our stock into their dugout stable at night, giving them a little hay to gnaw at, and during the day, when not in use, we kept them out on the dry buffalo-grass. As yet we were feeding them no grain, saving that for a time of need.

"From now on," Tom said, "I want you men to be particular to put harness, tools, an' everything under shelter of nights, so that we can find these things when we want 'em, for we're liable to get up 'most any morning now and find a couple of feet of snow on the ground an' this ravine between us an' the stable drifted level full. In that case we'll want the spade an' shovel to clear away a

passage to the stable door, so's we can 'tend to the stock; for a blizzard is liable to keep up the howl for several days an' nights; an' during such a spell we won't dare to poke our noses out of the shanty further than to feed the stock. We'll fix Found a comfortable bed in the tent, between the stacks of wolfskins, where he can be of some service as a sentry without being too much exposed, but in case of a very keen spell we'll bring him into the dugout."

Previous to this time Jack and I had explored the country for a distance of ten or twelve miles in every direction—not looking for game particularly, for that was always plenty close around camp, but for signs of the presence of Indians. We had discovered, however, no fresh signs—nothing to indicate that Indians had visited this part of the country more recently than a couple of months past. This fact encouraged us, and we hoped that we would be fortunate enough to finish our winter's work undisturbed. Still, Indians were likely to be moving about occasionally, even at this time of the year, and might yet discover our camp, in which case they might make it unpleasant for us.

This part of the plains was sometimes ranged over by the Cheyennes, Arapahoes, and other tribes, but had been for some time past the special range of the Kiowas, who, under the leadership of Satank, Satanta, and Big Tree, were ever

ready to wipe out a small party when the opportunity presented.

While we relied somewhat on our proximity to Fort Larned as a protection from Indian depredations, we felt that our only real security was in not being discovered by the Kiowas until our hunting season was over and we were ready to break camp and return to the settlements.

On Tom's last trip over to the fort he had learned that our old Company K, First Cavalry, together with the other three companies from Fort Wise, under command of Captain Elmer Otis, had passed by Fort Larned a few days before, *en route* to Fort Leavenworth and the war.

We were all sorry that we had not learned of the passing of our old command in time for one of our party, at least, to meet them at Fort Larned and exchange gossip with them; and Jack was regretting that he had not re-enlisted, instead of going wolf hunting, so that he could now be going to the front with them. He feared that the fighting would be all over and the war brought to a close before he got a chance at it.

"Don't you fret about this war coming to a close before you can get a whack at them rebels," said Tom. "It's just a-getting under good headway now, an' there'll be lots of good fighting yet for you and me; and more'n likely, if we live through it, we'll be longing for peace long before peace comes again."

Our tent was fast becoming filled with bales of wolfskins, and one day I asked:

"Tom, what are we going to do for some place to store our wolfskins? Our tent is nearly full, and we are still taking them, and the season isn't half through."

"I've been thinking about that, too," replied the old man, "and I guess I'll make another trip over to the fort to-morrow to get them buffalo calfskins for my overcoat, an' while I'm over there I'll try to get the use of an empty room there among the old dobes where we can store 'em; an' we can take a wagon-load over from time to time as the tent gets too full."

Next day he went to the fort, returning on the following evening, with a lot of Indian-dressed buffalo calfskins for his overcoat, and reported that he had engaged an unused room of Weisselbaum wherein to store our baled skins.

Tom soon had a very serviceable overcoat made from the calfskins—far better than the coyote coats Jack and I had made us—lining it with a red blanket and covering the collar and cuffs with muskrat skins, which have a beautiful fur, somewhat similar to the beaver in color but not so heavy.

As yet we had had but one light fall of snow—nothing like a storm—and it had soon passed off, the weather continuing fair but quite cold of nights and mornings.

One day, as we were about to sit down to dinner, my attention was arrested by a whoop or two that had a familiar sound, and, on looking out on the trail toward the fort, I saw a mounted man coming at a gallop. Found, too, seemed to think he had heard that whoop before, for he ran up onto the dirt roof of our dugout, looked and listened a moment at the approaching horseman, and when the shout was repeated he hesitated no longer but with a wild yelp of recognition dashed away to meet the newcomer.

I had just time to call to my comrades in the dugout: "See here, men, I believe it's Wild Bill," when, as they came rushing out, I noticed the mounted man halt suddenly and roll off his horse as the dog met him, and in a moment more Found and his master were rolling over the ground hugging each other in mad delight, while Bill's horse stood looking on in apparent astonishment at their wild antics.

As Bill came walking up to camp, leading his horse, with Found prancing and yelping about him, I thought I had never seen a dog so nearly crazy with delight. No doubt, Found had often thought of his absent master and had wondered what had become of him and whether he would ever see him again; and now they were reunited, and both seemed overjoyed at the meeting.

After hearty greetings and handshakes all around the scout tied his horse to a wheel of the wagon

while we all retired to the dugout, where our dinners were in danger of getting cold, and were soon seated around the mess box, eating and talking, for we all had a great deal to say to Bill, and he to us. Found had huddled down beside his master and was not neglected.

"I hope you've come to stay several days with us, Bill," said Tom.

"No, boys," replied the scout; "I'll stay with you to-night, but I've got to get back to the fort to-morrow. You see, the regulars are going away before long, and the troops that's coming to take their places are volunteers and, of course, green as grass about frontier service and managing Injuns; an' so me an' French Dave an' a few other ol' hands have got to get out an' scout around and find out where the Injuns are at an' try to find out how they're feelin' toward the whites, an' so forth. That's what I was sent out here ahead of the volunteers for. But when I get back to the fort I'll be close enough to come over an' take a square meal with you every now and then."

Leaving Bill and Tom to talk while the old man cleared up the dishes, Jack and I went out to attend to the stock; and the Irishman suggested that while I took our two broncos out of the stable and staked them on the lee side of the haystack he would unsaddle the scout's horse and put him in the stable. When Bill came out and found what he had done he remonstrated.

"Now, boys, I don't want you to go to any trouble on my account, for I'm used to taking things as they come, an' my horse is, too. I'm afraid it'll be hard on your broncos to turn 'em out in the cold."

"Not a bit of it," replied Jack. "The weather's not bad now, an' they're tough, anyway. You see, we don't have the honor of entertainin' the Honorable William Hickock, Esq., every day, an' we want to treat him so well that he'll come again."

'Well, I'll sure do it," replied the scout; then taking a look at our camp and surrounding grounds, he added: "Boys, you've certainly picked out an' built a good camp an' planned everything handy for your winter's work. I think I can see ol' Tom's handiwork all through this layout."

"You're right," said Jack; "if it wasn't for ol' Tom's brains I don't know what we'd do."

Going into the stable again, Jack brought out Black Prince to show him to Bill.

"This is the horse that we captured from them jayhawkers back t'other side of Council Grove," he said as he led the black out for the scout's inspection.

"He's a fine-lookin' fellow, Jack. Is he any good?"

"You bet. One of the best horses for all-'round service I ever saw," replied the enthusiastic Irishman.

We had a great time that afternoon relating to Bill all the happenings since we parted with him in Leavenworth, and after supper we still had plenty to talk about by candle-light.

"Boys, you seem to have taken good care of Found," said Bill, stroking the dog's head again for the thousandth time, "judging by his looks and the contented way he's stuck to you. Has he been any account to you?"

"That he has," replied Jack. "He's one of the best and smartest dogs I ever saw. I don't know how we'd get along without him."

"Well, I guess he may as well make his home with you as long as you stay here, for I'll be away from the post pretty often, an' I wouldn't like to leave him there to run with everybody; but if you've no objections I'll take him over to Larned with me to-morrow, just to give him a little exercise an' let him renew old acquaintance with the soldiers an' officers, for they all know him; an' I'll be coming by this way in a day or so again—for I expect I'll have to take a trip over to the Smoky Hill to locate the Kiowas—an' then I'll leave him with you again."

"All right, Bill, he's your dog," replied Jack, "but he's mighty welcome here an' he's a lot of help to us minding camp."

"No doubt of it, for he's got more sense than some people have. I can talk to him an' tell him to do things, an' he seems to understand 'most

everything I say to him an' will do just what I tell him to."

"Bill," I asked, "do the officers at the garrison seem to think there's any danger of the Indians going on the war-path?"

"Well, no, I don't think they really expect any outbreak," replied the scout, "but Injuns, you know, are the most uncertain varmints on earth; an' on account of taking away the regulars an' putting green volunteers to garrisoning the posts on the plains, it's more'n likely that the Injuns'll soon discover the difference an' take advantage of the chance to raise a ruction. I've got to look up the Kiowas first, 'cause they're the most likely ones to make trouble; an' when I find their winter camp I'll stay with 'em a few days, to kinder feel of 'em an' see what sort of a humor they're in, an' then I'll hunt up the Cheyennes an' Arapahoes next an' feel of their pulses, too. An' while I'm a-doing that job French Dave an' the other fellows'll be looking up the Comanches an' Prairie Apaches—they generally range between the Cimarron an' Red River, an' ain't likely to come up this way before grass comes, anyway, but the Kiowas an' Cheyennes'll need watchin'."

"Well, when you get back you must call around here and let us know what you think of the prospect for peace or war—that is, if you find out anything," I said.

"How many of you will go on this trip?" asked Tom.

"Only two—me an' John Adkins. You see, Frenchy is to take a man with him an' round up the country south of the Arkansas, along the Cimarron an' the Canadians, an' I'll take Adkins with me an' scout the country north till we find the camps.

Next morning, after breakfast, Wild Bill, followed by Found, took the trail back to Fort Larned. Jack and I made our usual round of the baits in the forenoon, skinned the dead wolves that we found lying about them, brought in the skins and pegged them down to dry.

In the afternoon we started out afoot to kill some fresh meat for our mess, the Irishman going up the creek in search of antelope or deer while I walked down to the slough to see if there were any water-fowl there to be picked up. I killed a sandhill crane and returned to camp. Jack had done better than I, having killed a large deer and come back and taken Prince out to carry the meat in. Tom had outdone us both, having killed four antelope without leaving camp.

"How in the world did you do it, Tom?" I asked as I come to where he was busy skinning and dressing four dead antelope that he had strung up.

"Well, sir, I'll tell you how it was," replied he with a gratified smile, still plying his butcher-knife. "Soon after you men left camp a bunch of antelope come playing 'round on the prairie out yonder,

up the ravine a piece, but, as they wouldn't come quite close enough to suit me, I got out a red blanket, tied it to a little pole, an' crept along up the ravine till I got about opposite to 'em, an' then raised the red blanket above the bank an' planted the pole.

"Soon as they sighted the strange red thing they raised their heads an' stared at it a bit, an' then come up toward it, all in a bunch, an' stopped an' took another look. Then they seemed to get frightened an' turned an' run away, but I knew they'd come back. They circled 'round an' come up again an' halted for another look, an' then run away again an' circled 'round an' come back, an' each time they came a little closer.

"I noticed that when they'd halt to gaze at the blanket they'd line up four or five abreast; so the idea struck me that if I could get back into another little ravine that was close by, an' crawl up that a little ways, so as to take 'em in flank when they'd line up thataway, I'd get two or three of 'em. I did that, an' the next time they halted an' lined up there were four of 'em in range, with their sides to me, an' I turned loose an' killed three of 'em an' wounded the fourth so that I got him next shot."

'You did a good job, and did it well, too," I replied. Just then Jack came up with his load of deer meat. "Why, Jack," I began, "how in the

world did you happen to kill a buck? I didn't think you were hunter enough to stalk a deer."

"You don't appear to know me, young fellow," he returned with a swaggering air. "It's a mighty hunter I'm getting to be, as well as a famous trapper."

"But tell us all about how you got that buck; I know there's something to explain about it," I replied.

"Well, now," laying aside his assumed braggadocio and becoming the candid Irishman again, "to tell you the honest God's truth, I just blundered onto him. It was this way: I was a-sneaking along through the timber when all of a suddent I sees this laddybuck a-standing broadside to me, only about twenty steps away, an' he hadn't seen nor heard me, for I was behind a big tree. I was that nervous I didn't think I could have hit the side of a barn, so I rested my carbine against the side of the tree, took as good aim as I could about where I thought his heart ought to be—right behind the fore shoulder—an' let him have it; an' I'm blest if I didn't fetch him, first pop. He gave one big bound into the air an' fell dead; an' just then two does, that had been laying down behind some bushes, jumped an' run an' were out of sight in a jiffy, before I could shove another cartridge into me carbine. But I didn't want any more deer meat just then, so I came back to camp to get the horse to fetch the meat in."

"But, Tom," I asked, "what are we going to do with so much venison?"

"Oh, it'll keep, all right; but then I'll be going over to the fort again in a day or so, an' I guess I'd as well take two or three of the carcasses over there an' sell 'em to the officers' mess."

CHAPTER XVI

TOM LOCKS THE STABLE DOOR

THIS evening, just before dark, when we were bringing in the tools and making things secure for the night, I noticed that Tom had got out an old padlock that had long lain unused in the mess-chest, and then had found a piece of trace-chain, and with the two had securely locked the stable door—a precaution that we had never thought necessary before—and I asked him: "What are you doing that for, Tom? Seen any fresh signs about?"

"No," he answered, "but 'tain't much trouble an' it's always best to be on the safe side. We've been used to having Found to do guard-duty of nights, an' it may have got us in a fashion of sleeping sounder than we would if we'd had to look out for ourselves; now, while the dog is away, with the stable door unlocked it would be easy enough for an Injun to sneak our horses out an' get away with 'em."

I smiled at what seemed to me a useless precaution and it passed from my mind; but along in the night, after we had been some hours asleep, I

was suddenly awakened by a slight noise like the rattling of a chain.

Instantly I was thoroughly aroused and remembered Tom's chain on the stable door. Had I been dreaming? I raised my head cautiously and listened intently. There it was again—unmistakably the chain on the stable door.

I determined to investigate before arousing my comrades, and slipping quietly out of my bed I tiptoed carefully to the door, pulled up one corner of the muslin cover to the lookout hole, and peeped out at the stable door. The moon was shining brightly, and there, to my astonishment, sat a man, crouched at the door of the stable intently working at the lock, either trying to pick it or pry it off. He was not an Indian, either. He had soldier clothes on, and beside him on the ground lay a small bundle.

I took in all this at a glance, and then quietly and quickly slipped back to Tom's bed, shook him gently, and whispered:

"Sh! don't make a bit of noise, Tom. There's a man working at the lock on the stable door. Get up quietly while I wake Jack."

It was more difficult to keep the excitable Irishman quiet while arousing him, but I succeeded in getting him up without making noise enough to be heard outside. Each man took a look through the peep-hole and saw that the crouching soldier was still intently working at the lock.

"Now," I whispered to my comrades, "let each one of us get his carbine or pistol ready, and be careful to keep them from rattling, and when I open our door we'll call on him to throw up his hands and take him prisoner."

"I think I'll give him a load of shot first," whispered Jack, who had the shotgun, "an' then call on him to throw up."

Finding that I could not open our door without making a noise, I jerked it wide open quickly. As I did so the kneeling man turned the full side of his face to me, and in the bright moonlight I recognized private John Flaherty, one of two soldiers who not long before, with Lieutenant Smith, had been caught in a blizzard at our camp and had stayed there until the storm was over. Seeing Jack raise his shotgun to fire, I knocked the muzzle up as I exclaimed:

"Don't shoot, Jack, it's Flaherty!"

He had pressed the trigger, but my throwing the barrels up sent the load of shot into the dirt roof of the stable instead of into Flaherty's back.

I wondered at the stupid, sluggish manner of the man as he rose to his feet at the report of the gun, but when he started off up the path leading to the top of the bank his uncertain gait plainly showed that he was drunk.

Dropping his shotgun, Jack bounded out and up the path after him, soon overtaking the drunken soldier, seizing him by the collar and cuffing him

right heartily, with each slap rebuking the would-be horse thief for his drunkenness and thievery.

When Flaherty was brought into the dugout it was evident that he was almost senseless from drink. He was taken over to Found's bed and left there, sound asleep.

"There," said Tom, "we forgot to bring in that little bundle he left by the stable door."

He brought it in, and on opening it it was found to consist of a pint bottle with a little whiskey in it and a change of underclothing marked with the man's initials.

"Well," said Tom, "this poor fellow has gone on a spree; while drunk the idea of deserting has come to him, and he has started off over the prairie in the dead of winter, through an Indian country, without arms, provisions, or clothing. As I have often said, a man who is drunk is literally crazy, and this proves it."

Next morning, when Flaherty was aroused, he had at first no idea where he was and, after he had been told, no idea how he got here. He professed that he had no wish to desert, for he was getting along in his company as well as any of the men and his time of service had nearly expired.

However, he actually had deserted, and he did not know what to do, whether to go back and give himself up and take his punishment or whether to go on. Tom said to him:

"Of course, Flaherty, you can do as you like, but I really think, under the circumstances, you had best go back and give yourself up and take your medicine. Maybe, if I go along with you and explain the situation to Lieutenant Smith, and ask him to intercede with the commanding office, you can be returned to duty without a court martial."

"Would you do that for me, Tom?" asked Flaherty gratefully.

"I'll do all I can for you, Flaherty, for I do not hold you responsible for what you have done; but you had a mighty close call, and if whiskey serves you that way you ought to take warning and swear off."

"That's just what I've been thinking, Tom, and I swear right now I'll never taste another drop."

As I rode up to camp about sundown that day I noticed two or three mounted men far out on the high prairie, coming on the trail from Fort Larned. The field-glass made them out to be Wild Bill and John Adkins with a pack-mule, and Found trotting along with them. They soon reached us and dismounted and began unpacking.

"Is supper most ready, boys?" asked Bill.

"I'll have it ready," replied Jack, "by the time you're ready for it."

"We've just got room in the stable for your two horses," I explained, "in place of the mule team Tom took with him, and I guess I'll take one

of our broncos out and tie it behind the haystack to make room for your pack-mule, Bill."

"Don't you do anything of the kind, Peck," replied the scout. "That's one of Uncle Sam's mules, an' he'll do well enough tied in the lee of your haystack; in fact, it wouldn't hurt our horses much, either, to stand out."

While Bill, Adkins, and I had been watering, feeding, and putting away the stock, Jack had been getting supper, and now stepped to the door of the dugout with his fiddle and sounded "mess call," to see if the scout would know what it meant.

"That sounds pretty natural," said Bill to me, "let's go in an' see what he's got to show for it, for I'm as hungry as a coyote."

As we gathered around the mess-chest I inquired:

"When do they expect the volunteers that are coming to relieve the regulars?"

"Don't know a thing, only that they're on the road somewhere 'tween here an' Leavenworth. Now, if they were regulars you could calculate to the hour when they'd get here, for when they get orders to go anywhere neither hell nor high water'll stop 'em; but if a little bad weather strikes these volunteers, an' they can find a snug camping place, they're liable to hang up for a week or two, an' put in the time stealing chickens an' playing cards."

"How long do you and Adkins expect to be gone on this trip, Bill?"

"Well, now, that's a sort of a 'kin-savvy' case," he replied. "It depends on how soon we find the Injuns' camp. Maybe it'll take us a week—maybe two weeks or more—can't tell; but once we get onto their trail we'll soon overhaul 'em. John, here, says that ol' To hausen, the 'Little Mountain,' an' his band is camped right down Walnut Creek, about half-way 'tween here an' Charley Rath's ranch—'bout twenty-five miles from here."

"Yes," said Adkins, "I was up to their camp 'bout a week ago, an since that some of the Injuns was down to the ranch a-trading; but they don't know, for sure, where Satank an' the rest of the tribe is; but they thought we'd be apt to find 'em on the Smoky, or the Saline, or Solomon, or maybe on some of the little timbered creeks in between the rivers."

"Do you think, Adkins," I asked, "that there is any likelihood of To hausen's band moving up this way? For it would bother our wolf-hunting business if they should come near us."

"Oh, they may be a-moving camp now an' then, to get fresh grass for their hosses; but if they get to crowdin' on you, all you've got to do is to go to ol' To hausen an' ask him to keep far enough away so's not to interfere with your wolf poisoning, an' he'll do it, for he's a pretty good ol' In-

jun, an' always tries to keep on good terms with the whites. There's only about a hundred men in his band, an' they're mostly ol' men what's had experience enough to know that it pays better to keep on good terms with Uncle Sam's people than to be bucking again 'em. But the most of the tribe now seems to be of the other way of thinking an' have split off from ol' To hausen, who used to be head chief, an' taken to following the lead of such devils as Satank, an' Satanta, an' Big Tree; an' they're the ones we've got to look out for."

"Where do vou expect to find the Kiowa trail, Bill?"

"Well, from here, we'll follow this ol' lodge-pole trail; it turns off from the Walnut a few miles up the creek an' goes over to the Smoky Hill, which is about twenty miles from here; an' about opposite this point on the Smoky is a mail station on the Denver stage route, an' I reckon we'll be able to find out from the station men whether the Kiowas have gone up or down the river an' lay our course to suit."

"When we first came here," I informed him, "it looked like the last travel over the trail had been about two months before—that would have been about September—and the tracks were going toward the Smoky Hill; but they might have been made by Cheyennes or 'Rapahoes."

"We'll be apt to find an old moccasin, or a

broken arrow, or somethin' dropped or thrown away on the trail, before we travel very far, that'll tell what tribe travelled it last," remarked the scout.

"I noticed that you don't carry any picket-pin," I remarked; "how do you picket your horse out?"

"I picket him to a hole in the ground. I dig a hole with my knife about a foot deep; tie a big knot in the end of my lariat; put it down in the bottom of the hole; fill in the dirt an' tamp it down hard as I can with my foot; an' that'll hold him 'bout as good as a picket-pin, an' saves the trouble, an' saves my horse the weight of the iron pin; an' I always try to lighten my horse's load of every ounce I can do away with. An' when I'm out by myself, or where there's nobody to stan' guard at night, I make my bed with my head on my saddle, 'bout half-way 'tween my horse an' the end of my lariat that's buried, an' if anything strange comes in sight the horse'll begin running 'round at the end of his rope, an' dragging it over me'll wake me up."

"Well, your way of doing these things is just about the same as we were trained to do in the cavalry," I remarked.

"Why, of course," replied Bill, "for nearly all I know about scouting is what I learnt from the ol' cavalrymen an' ol' army officers. You take one of them ol' soldiers or officers that's been out

on the frontier fifteen or twenty years, an' what he don't know about such matters ain't worth knowing."

In the morning, after breakfast, while assisting the two scouts to saddle up and pack their mule, Jack cut off an antelope ham and tied it in their pack, "to give them a starting of fresh meat," as he said.

Taking up a position in front of Bill, Found stood wagging his tail and looking up pleadingly into his master's face, seeming to ask: "May I go with you?"

"No, Found," said the scout, between whom and his dog there seemed to be a perfect understanding, "you can't go. It'd be too long an' hard a road for you an' would wear you out. You must stay right here till I come back."

Then, turning to me, he said:

"You'd better get his chain an' collar an' I'll tie him to that post there, an' he'll know by that that I don't want him to go an' he'll not try to follow us after we leave."

I brought the chain and Bill took it and tied the dog, petting and talking kindly to him, and then making him lie down, which seemed to satisfy Found that his master desired him to remain.

"Let us hear from you, Bill," I requested, "as soon as you get back, will you, for I'd like to know how the Kiowas are feeling."

"Yes, I will," he replied; "if I don't come back

this way I'll come over from the fort soon after we get back."

Mounting their horses—Adkins leading the pack-mule, while Wild Bill rode behind to drive it up—they crossed the creek below the beaver dam, and were soon out of sight behind the timber.

CHAPTER XVII

VOLUNTEER TROOPS AT LARNED

TOM returned from Fort Larned that evening. He hoped that his intercession for Flaherty would procure a mitigation of the usual penalty; but desertion, even under extenuating circumstances, was too serious an offence to pass without at least a form of punishment. The culprit was put in the guard-house, with a fair prospect, however, of being released and restored to duty before long.

The long-expected three companies of volunteer cavalry had arrived to relieve the old garrison, and as soon as the government property could be transferred from the old officials to the new, the old garrison—two companies of Second Infantry and one of Second Dragoons—would march away to Fort Leavenworth. A week later our old comrades, the regulars, were gone.

On his return from his next visit to Fort Larned, two weeks later, Tom had much to say about the lack of discipline shown by the volunteers at the fort, and as we gathered around the mess box, after putting the mules away, he continued his complaints.

"The volunteers don't know anything about soldiering," said Tom, "an' the officers are no better. It nearly broke my heart to see the miserable imitation of military service they're gettin' off.

"Now, to give you an idea of their style, compared with regulars, what would you think to see a buck private in his dirty fatigues come a-saunterin' up to the adjutant's office, flop himself down in a chair, hoist his muddy boots up onto a table, push his hat back, an' say to the commanding officer, who was occupying a similar position on the opposite side of the table: 'Well, Joe, what do you think of this layout, as far as you've got?'"

"Oh, come now, Tom," said Jack with an incredulous smile, "you don't expect us to believe such a yarn as that?"

"It's gospel truth," exclaimed the old man. "Here's another sample of how they do it: A captain was standin' in front of the adjutant's office smokin' a cigar, an' a corporal strolled up to him an' asked: 'I say, Cap, have you got the mate to that about your clothes?'"

"Peck, do you believe him?" said Jack, appealing to me; and without waiting for my answer, he continued: "I do be afeared Tom's been mixin' his drinks."

"Here's another one," said Tom. "A lieutenant an' about a dozen men come out of their

quarters an' started straggling off toward the stables, an' I followed 'em to see what they were up to. They went into the stable an' went to saddling their horses to go somewheres. By and by the lieutenant got his horse saddled an' called back into the stable: 'Are you all ready there, boys?' Some were ready, an' come leadin' their horses out; but one fellow called back to him: 'Don't you get in such a rush there now, for I've got to put my spurs on yet.' Another fellow said: 'I've got a notion not to go, for I told the sergeant not to put my name on this detail.' 'Oh, yes, John, you'd better come along. We'll have a good time,' said the lieutenant, kind of coaxing him.

"Well, after callin' back again to the man who hadn't got his spurs on, an' getting the answer that he was about ready, instead of giving his commands in military style, to 'Lead into line!' 'Count fours!' 'Prepare to mount!' 'Mount!' 'Form ranks!' an' then move out 'by fours,' how do you suppose he did it? Well, sir, he just says: 'Well, get on your horses, boys,' an' climbed onto his horse, an' started off, saying as he looked back over his shoulder: 'Come ahead, fellows.' An' they straggled off after him.

"Well, they're good enough men, on an average, I guess," continued Tom, "an' will make good soldiers if they just had the right sort of officers over 'em; for good officers make good soldiers, an'

vice versa. But how can the blind lead the blind? Their officers can't instruct the men, for the officers don't know anything about military matters themselves. An' it's one of the truest sayings that ever was said that 'familiarity breeds contempt'; an' if an officer, or even a non-com, expects to command the respect and obedience of them that's subject to his orders, he's got to hold himself aloof from 'em, to a reasonable degree; an' he's got to prove himself competent to command 'em."

Naturally, Jack and I became very anxious to go over to the fort and see things for ourselves, and when the time came for going after our next mail and taking in another load of wolfskins Tom agreed to let us both make the trip, on a strict promise from Jack that he would not taste liquor.

At the post we found the state of affairs about as Tom had represented. Officers and men seemed equally ignorant of military affairs and especially of frontier service.

While loafing about the sutler's store next day, Weisselbaum came out of his back room and, calling me to one side, said confidentially:

"I've got a job for you, Peck, and there's good pay in it, too. It's this way: There's a young man here, Lieutenant Lang, in command of one of these companies; he's got plenty of money; his father's rich an' furnishes him plenty. He's a

first-rate fellow. But he's considerably embarrassed just now," he continued; "the captain of the company has been away from it for several months, leaving the lieutenant in command, and during that time he has received a lot of government property, for which he's got to account, of course, and he's kept no accounts and has nothing to show what's become of this stuff. You see, he's in a bad fix, and unless he can find some one who understands these affairs to help him out, he's going to have to pay the government several hundred dollars—maybe as much as a thousand or two—out of his own pocket, or his daddy's rather. He stated his case to me and asked if I knew of any one that he could get to straighten up his company papers; and when I saw you I remembered that you used to be company clerk in your old company at Fort Riley, and I thought you would know how to help him out of the scrape, if anybody would. He'll be willing to pay you big for it. What do you say to the job?"

"I hardly know what to say," I replied. "I'll have to consult my partners over at the camp before I can give an answer. It may be that I can arrange with them to get away from the wolf hunting business long enough to do this work for the lieutenant, but I can't promise it till I consult Tom and Jack."

"Well, come back into my office," said Weissel-

baum, "and let me make you acquainted with Mr. Lang, and you can talk it over with him."

On following him into his back room I was introduced to a pleasant-looking young officer of about twenty-five, who wore the uniform and shoulder-straps of first lieutenant of cavalry, but whose appearance showed evidences of dissipation. He seemed pleased to find a man who understood Uncle Sam's ways of transacting business, and still more gratified when I told him that I thought possibly I could find means to relieve him of a part, if not all, of his accountability; which he knew meant not only the saving of so many dollars, but would prevent an official investigation that might result in his dismissal from the service. I told him I could not promise to take charge of his papers and begin on the work until I had consulted my partners. He would pay me a hundred dollars, he said, to make the effort and do what I could for him, and two hundred if I succeeded in clearing him of all his accountability and put his company papers in good shape, so that his company clerk could thereafter keep them straight.

I promised him that I would return in a day or two probably prepared to go to work on his accounts. This so pleased him that he called for a bottle of champagne, in which, however, I declined joining him and retired, leaving him and Weisselbaum drinking the wine.

Jack and I had seen enough of the rawness of

these volunteers to fully corroborate Tom's reports, and as we drove back to camp I informed my comrade of the proposition I had received for straightening out the tangles in which the lieutenant had involved himself.

"How long's it going to take you?" he asked.

"About two or three weeks, I think," I replied.

"Well, of course we'll let you off for that long, in consideration of the big pay you'll be getting."

When we got to camp and I had stated the proposition to Tom, he replied promptly:

"Jump onto it, by all means. You won't often find such chances as that for making money layin' around loose on the plains or anywhere else. That's big money for a little work. Jack an' me'll give you a leave of absence long enough to make yourself a nice little wad on the side."

"No, Tom," I answered. "I won't have it that way. We have agreed, all along, that this is a full partnership of the firm of Vance, Flannigan & Peck and that whatever we make or lose we are to share equally. Jack insisted on this rule when he captured Black Prince, and I shall insist that whatever I make on this work shall be turned into the general fund."

"Well, suit yourself about it," said Tom indifferently; "any way to keep peace in the family. We'll call it detached service you're on, then, instead of a leave of absence."

The matter being settled, next day I rode Prince

over to the fort and began looking up material to begin the work in hand. By searching the adjutant's office and quartermaster's store I found the requisite blanks and books for opening up a full set of company accounts, including muster and pay rolls, for I found the lieutenant had little or nothing in the way of papers except the invoices of property he had received. Having duly established an office in one of Lang's rooms and got everything ready for business, I said to the lieutenant:

"Now, Mr. Lang, in order that you may get the full benefit of my services in this work, it is best that you have your first sergeant and company clerk in attendance here whenever they can be spared from their other duties, and let me be instructing them, so that they can continue the work after I get things straightened out for them."

"A good idea," he admitted. "I'll go over to his office and have a chat with the sergeant about it, and if he thinks he'd like to learn your style of keeping accounts I'll invite him to come over and see how you do it and bring his clerk along."

"Why, lieutenant," I said in some surprise at this evidence of slack discipline, "I thought you were in command of the company."

"So I am; so I am. Why?"

"Well, in that case, it's your place to order the attendance of your sergeant and clerk and their place to obey promptly."

"Yes, yes. That's the way you do in the regulars, I suppose; but, you know, we ain't so particular in the volunteers, and I find it's best to keep on good terms with my first sergeant 'cause he'll make trouble for me if I cross him."

"Well, excuse me; I forgot myself," I replied with ill-concealed disgust. "I wasn't employed by you to teach you discipline. But if you can persuade your sergeant to come over, I'll see if I can interest him in these papers."

But the sergeant refused to take instructions from "one of them swell-headed regulars who think they know it all." The company clerk, however, cheerfully placed himself under my tutelage and picked up the work rapidly.

By taking invoices of the property Lieutenant Lang had on hand and comparing them with the invoices of what he had received, I soon found what was deficient. I then set his men to work looking about the post and gathering up, from among the rubbish and castaway property abandoned by the outgoing garrison, every old article of quartermaster's and ordnance stores and camp and garrison equipage that could be found. I then asked the lieutenant to call on the commanding officer for a board of survey, who inspected and condemned the stuff and ordered it burned, thereby relieving Lang of his accountability for it.

There was still a considerable shortage of arms and things that I could not pick up about the post

and get condemned, but, on learning that this company had been engaged in a skirmish with the rebels in Missouri recently, I covered a considerable deficit on the returns as "lost in action," on the affidavits of soldiers, and accounted for some other stuff as legitimately "worn out or expended in the public service."

By these and other methods usually resorted to in the regular service to cover deficiencies I soon had Lieutenant Lang's accountability reduced to the property he actually had on hand; and, while doing so, instructed his company clerk so that thereafter he could easily keep the accounts in safe shape.

My work for Lang attracted considerable attention from the other company commanders and they soon got to dropping in to consult me in regard to making out papers and all sorts of military matters.

At the expiration of my contract, Lieutenant Lang cheerfully paid me the two hundred dollars—which I deposited with Weisselbaum to the credit of the firm—and expressed himself as glad to get out of his recent dilemma so cheaply.

While at this work I was often one of the busiest men about the post. These officers, though inexperienced, were gentlemanly fellows, and not having had that regular army legend ground into them about the impassable gulf between the enlisted man and the commissioned officer, though know-

ing that I had but recently been a private soldier, treated me as an equal. Even the major commanding often consulted me on technical affairs, and offered to use his influence to procure me a commission in the regiment if I would join his command, which kind offer I declined with thanks. I had made up my mind not to bind myself to Uncle Sam again, though—after this wolf hunting campaign—I planned to enter the service as a scout or wagon-master or in some civilian capacity that would give me more freedom than as a soldier or officer.

CHAPTER XVIII

BILL RETURNS FROM HIS SCOUT

DURING the time I had been at work on Lieutenant Lang's papers there had been another heavy snow, but it had soon passed off. Tom had come over to the fort once or twice, reporting all serene at Camp Coyotelope; and about the time I had finished my job and was preparing to return to wolf skinning, Wild Bill and John Adkins came into the post, returning from the main Kiowa camp by way of old To hausen's village on Walnut Creek.

"When are you going over to Camp Coyotelope?" asked Bill after first greetings.

"To-morrow morning," I replied.

"Well, I've got to make my report to the commanding officer an' turn in my pack-mule," said the scout, "an' if there's nothing special for me to do here right away I reckon I'll ride over with you an' take a few square meals with the boys."

"All right," I replied. "I'll be glad to have you go along with me. Will Adkins come, too?"

"No. He says he's got to go back to Rath's ranch in the morning, soon as he can get his

voucher from the quartermaster for this trip an' get it cashed at Weisselbaum's."

"So this new quartermaster is short of greenbacks and has to pay off in vouchers, hey?"

"Yes, an' Weisselbaum only discounts 'em twenty-five cents on the dollar. But I won't sell my voucher at any such robbery figures. I don't need the money very bad here, an' so I'll just let it stand till the quartermaster gets the funds, or if he don't get the truck by spring I'll take my vouchers to Fort Leavenworth where I can get all they call for."

Finding nothing requiring his immediate attendance at the post, Bill easily obtained permission to go over to our camp, notifying the quartermaster where he could be found in case he was needed.

As we rode along he told me about his trip to Satank's village.

"As I expected, we picked up the Kiowas' trail over on the Smoky Hill, followed it up, an' found 'em in a snug-timbered camp over on the Solomon. They'd moved to this camp from another one a few miles up the river since the blizzard, because while that big snow was on the ground they'd had to chop down all the cottonwood-trees about that camp to furnish feed for their ponies and in case of another big snow catching 'em in the same camp, the feed there would have been pretty scarce. An' they'd just about got settled down in the new camp

when this last snow come on. Me and Adkins were in luck, too, for this last snow come next day after we reached the Injun camp; an' during all the time it lay on the ground me and John were making ourselves as agreeable an' comfortable as possible in ol' Satank's lodge. I knew what a sour ol' cuss he is, an' the best way to get on the good side of him an' find out what he is up to was to go right to his tepee, an' let on that we'd come to pay him a special visit.

"We found that the Injuns didn't have much of anything to eat but meat, so we brought out our sugar an' coffee an' hardtack an' bacon an' treated the ol' man an' his family to some extra good grub—for them; an' I'd took along some beads an' colored handkerchiefs an' trinkets for the women an' youngsters. But, sir, that durned old rascal would eat my chuck an' take presents, all right, but when I'd try to pump him he was the most ignorant Injun you ever saw—I couldn't get a thing out of him. But then I didn't expect to find out much from Satank himself, for I know him of old.

"I made friends with Satanta and Big Tree, too, an' gave them some presents, an' now an' then invited 'em over to headquarters to smoke an' eat an' drink coffee with us, but they were pretty foxy, too, and didn't seem to know anything when I tried the pump on them. So when I found the head men were so close-mouthed I dropped them

an' let on as though I wasn't seeking for information; but I made myself solid with the women by making them presents of a lot of little trinkets, an' I knew if I went about it in an offhand way they'd tell me all they knew, for, you know, I can talk their language just like a Kiowa.

"It pleases them women for a white man to take notice of 'em an' talk to 'em an' be sociable like, for their own men don't pay 'em much attention.

"I soon found out about all the women knew, which wasn't much, however; but from what I picked up amongst 'em, an' from the general signs, the head men ain't a-feeling very friendly toward the whites, an' as soon as grass comes in the spring I suspect we'll have trouble with 'em."

"Do you think they'll go on the war-path, Bill?" I asked.

"No, I don't think they'll go to war openly or in a body, but they'll probably scout around in little bands, watchin' their chances an' doing a little mischief here an' there on the sly, whenever they see a good chance to dodge in, hit a lick, an' dodge out again without making an open rupture. But they promised to come down to Fort Larned, as soon as the grass begins to come in the spring, to have a powwow with the officers an' Injun agent, 'cause there's a chance of some presents in that, an' they're always ready to take all they can get an' more, too."

"What seems to be their principal grievance against the white men?" I asked.

"Well, it's the old song about the white men killing off their game. But, then, we all know that's just an excuse, for the game on the plains is plenty enough for all an' what little the whites get away with ain't missed. Of course, if they were to come around here an' see how many buffalo bones you fellows are leaving on the prairie they might think you were getting more than your share. But you've got just as much right to kill buffalo an' wolves, or any other game, as the Injuns have. Anyway, it ain't likely they'll get down this way before grass comes, an' you fellows'll be done skinning wolves an' gone before that time."

"I hope so," I replied. "I have no desire to renew my acquaintance with Satank. How about old To hausen, Bill; is he still camped at the same place?"

"Yes, his band was still camped about twenty or twenty-five miles down Walnut Creek from your camp; but To hausen was getting ready to move up your way, too, an' I reckon by this time he's moved. I told him about you fellows a-poisoning wolves and that you were particular friends of mine, an' asked him not to move up close enough to you to bother your work, an' he promised me he would keep far enough away so's not to trouble you. He's a pretty good ol' Injun, To hausen is, an' he's always been a good friend of

mine, an' I'm sure he'll not let any of his people interfere with you. Some of his outfit'll be apt to look you up in a few days, an' if they come to see you you must treat 'em well."

"Of course we will," I replied, "for we want to keep on good terms with them."

At Camp Coyotelope, which we reached in time for dinner, Bill had to repeat to Tom and Jack all he had told me about his trip to the Kiowa village. During the afternoon we lounged about camp and at the approach of evening Jack and I saddled up and made the round of the wolf baits, putting out fresh strychnine for the night, and returned to camp in time to help demolish an excellent supper.

That evening Tom suggested to the scout:

"Bill, while you're here, suppose you an' me ride down to ol' To hausen's camp to-morrow to see where he is an' make sure that he ain't a-crowding on our huntin'-ground—what do you say?"

"It's a whack, Tom; I'll go you!" replied Bill, "an' we'll have a fair understanding with the ol' man about how far he's to allow his people to range up this way."

In the morning they saddled up and started to go to the Indian camp, but to our surprise Bill and Tom were back at camp by noon, just as Jack and I were getting ready for dinner.

"Why, what brought you back so soon?" I asked as they rode up and dismounted.

"Well," replied Tom, as they began unsaddling, "we found their camp only about eight miles down the creek—a little closer than I like to have 'em, but the Injuns promised that they wouldn't hunt up this way any farther or do anything to drive off the game in our range; but what brought us back so soon was that when we got there we found ol' To hausen sick in bed, an' I think he's threatened with a severe spell of pneumonia; an' after having a friendly talk with his people and watching the ol' man's symptoms, I made up my mind what was the matter with him, and I concluded that I'd hurry right back to camp and get some medicine for him and then go back and try to fetch the old man out of it. I'm sure he's got a serious case of lung fever, and if something ain't done to head it off pretty *pronto* he'll go up the spout. I learned a good deal about doctoring when I was hospital steward, an' I think I've got everything except one that I need for the treatment of this case in my little medicine-chest. Bill's going back to Fort Larned after dinner, and I want you to go with him and bring out the medicine that I'm lacking. You can go over to the fort this afternoon and get the stuff an' come back to-morrow forenoon and then bring it down to the Injun camp to me in the afternoon; for I'll go right back after dinner and go to work on the old man and try to head off that fever before it gets too strong a hold on him."

As we entered the dugout and sat down to dinner I thought to ask:

"What medicine is it that you want me to get, Tom? You forgot to tell me the name of it."

With a mysterious wink at me when Jack was not looking, he answered:

"I'll write the name of it down on a piece of paper after dinner. You'd forget it if I told you."

When we went out to saddle up after dinner, leaving Jack to clean up the dishes, Tom said:

"The medicine I want you to get at the fort is nothing but a pint of commissary whiskey, but I didn't want to mention it before Jack. The doctors use it in pneumonia as a stimulant, diluted, an' given in tablespoonful doses. I've got everything else I need, and I'll take my little medicine-chest along with me down to the Injun camp in case there should be other sick ones that I'd want something for." Then he added: "You'd better take Prince to ride over to the fort and back. I rode him down to the camp, but he'll be good for your trip. I'll ride ol' Vinegar down to the camp this time; an' when you get back here to-morrow you can leave Prince here an' ride the gray mare or one of the mules down to the camp. By the way, while I think of it, I must take along a couple of candles an' a few more matches; for I'll have to be getting up in the night 'tendin' to the old man, an' there's no such thing as a light to be had in an

Injun lodge without a body goes to the trouble of starting up a blaze in the fire.

"I've got to keep on the right side of that old medicine-man that's doctoring the old chief now," said Tom; "and I'd like to teach him something if I could."

Soon we were ready and started, Bill and I cantering off on the trail while Tom struck out down the creek.

On arriving at Fort Larned, knowing that Lieutenant Lang always kept a demijohn of whiskey in his quarters, I procured a pint bottle of the "medicine" Tom desired and spent the night at his quarters.

Just before going to the officers' mess for supper with Lieutenant Lang that evening, thinking that it would be an interesting trip for him, I had suggested to him that he go out to our camp and see something of the Kiowas with whom later he might have some dealings. He declined to go on the ground that the weather was wintry and the ride a long one.

Captain Saunders, who was present, expressed surprise that Lieutenant Lang did not jump at the chance and said to me:

"Mr. Peck, if I can get leave of absence from the major, may I accompany you on this trip to the Indian camp?"

"Certainly, captain," I replied. "I'll be delighted to have you go along."

The captain joined us later and told me that he had easily obtained the desired permission, but asked me to say nothing about it to other company officers, lest more of them should wish to go, for the major didn't think it best to spare more than one on such an errand.

The next morning we set out and, after a long, cold ride, reached Camp Coyotelope. During the whole ride the captain kept plying me with questions about our past frontier service, evidently wishing to gain all the information he could about his new line of duty. He was a very pleasant and gentlemanly, young man, and although ignorant of military usage, he evinced a commendable eagerness to inform and qualify himself for his position.

CHAPTER XIX

A NIGHT IN THE KIOWA CAMP

WE reached the dugout just before noon, and after unsaddling, watering, and feeding our horses and partaking of a good dinner that Jack had prepared we saddled up again. I now rode the gray mustang, as Tom had suggested, and on one of our mules packed my bedding for the use of Captain Saunders and myself at the Indian camp. We struck out down the creek for the Kiowa camp, I leading the mule and the captain bringing up the rear. This kind of campaigning was a revelation to Captain Saunders and seemed to interest him greatly.

At the Indian camp Tom was anxiously awaiting me, and seemed surprised to see me accompanied by the officer, whom I introduced, explaining the occasion of his visit.

Under the impulse of his long and strict military training, Tom came to "attention" and saluted and seemed somewhat surprised at the captain's proffered hand. In the regular service hand-shaking between an officer and a soldier or ex-soldier would be considered a breach of army etiquette. Quickly comprehending the situation,

Tom grasped the extended hand and thereafter appeared to feel on terms of perfect equality with the officer.

"I can't allow you to see old To hausen," Tom explained, "he's too sick to see company; an' I can't devote much time to your entertainment myself, captain, but I'll tell the Injuns to try an' make your visit agreeable; an' you an' Peck'll have to get along the best you can."

Tom turned to an old Indian, who, he said, was next in rank to To hausen, and explained to him in Mexican who we were and the object of our visit. The old warrior then in a loud voice made an announcement to the camp in the Kiowa tongue, after which he repeated to Tom what he had told his people.

"This old fellow," explained Tom to the captain, "is named Lobo. He told the Indians that I said: 'These two white men are our good friends. One of them is a captain of soldiers from the fort. They heard that our chief was very sick and they have come all the way from the fort to bring some more good medicine for To hausen. They are good men an', Kiowas, you must be good to 'em. Our camp an' all that we have is at their service. Make them welcome, Kiowas.'

"Now," continued Tom, "as Lobo says, 'the camp is yours.' He has given orders to his women to unsaddle your horses an' unpack your mule, an' some of the youngsters will drive your animals

out an' put 'em in the herd. He has also ordered the women to clear out one half of his lodge for your use, an' your saddles an' beddin' will be carried in an' placed there, where you are to sleep. You are at liberty to go where you please about the camp, enter any lodge you choose, an' you'll find 'em all friendly and agreeable; an' you an' everything you have will be perfectly safe so long as you are their guest. Now, you'll have to excuse me, for I must go to my patient."

"By the way, how is the old chief?" asked the captain.

"Pretty feeble. His age is against him, for he must be up in the seventies. I'm getting the fever pretty well under control, and if he gets no backset I think I can pull him through. I have my bed close by him an' I try to keep the lodge at as even a temperature as possible; but I have to do most everything myself, for these Injuns can't be made to savvy how to take care of the sick. Now, I must go."

After seeing our animals sent out to the herd and our saddles and bedding taken into Lobo's lodge, we went inside, spread our bed, and then took a stroll about camp. Everything here—the Indians, their dress and habits—was new, strange, and deeply interesting to Captain Saunders, who had never before seen a wild Indian.

Noticing To hausen's dilapidated old ambulance standing near his lodge, I said:

"Captain, do you see that old government ambulance?"

"Yes," he replied, "and I have been wondering at it and was going to ask you if many of the Indians have such vehicles?"

"No. I don't know of another Indian on the plains who sports an ambulance or any other wheeled vehicle to ride in. I must tell you how he came by this one. In the spring of '59 the Kiowas were becoming restless, and disregarding the warnings and advice of the old chief, who was always friendly to the whites, they were inclined to follow the lead of Satank, who is always unfriendly. They were threatening to go on the war-path. Our command of four companies of First Cavalry, under Major John Sedgwick, was sent out on the plains from Fort Riley with orders to range along the Arkansas River to try to keep the Indians in subjection. The Pike's Peak gold excitement was at its height then, and an outbreak of the Indians would be a serious affair. Old To hausen tried hard to keep the Kiowas peaceable, but succeeded in holding only this small band of about a hundred warriors, the rest of the tribe following Satank. To hausen often visited our camps and our officers often gave him and his adherents presents. Our quartermaster, Lieutenant James B. McIntyre, had this old ambulance on hand, and, as it was about played out, he got it condemned by a board and was thinking

of burning it to get rid of the old trap, when it occurred to him to make a present of it to To hausen if he would accept it. The old fellow was very much pleased to think of riding about in such a rig as our commanding officer sometimes used. Lieutenant McIntyre had his blacksmith put the old rattletrap in serviceable shape; and then put harness on a pair of the old chief's mustangs and had them broken to work by some of the soldiers and turned the outfit over to To hausen. But neither he nor any of his men could learn to use the lines and, after a few efforts they dispensed with the lines altogether, and, putting a boy on each bronco of the team, they have since navigated the ambulance in that shape. Indian-like, they generally travel at a gallop, whether the ground is smooth or rough, and often break something, but they tie it up with rawhide to hold the parts together till they can get to Fort Larned or Fort Lyon, and then the quartermasters have their men patch it up again for the old man."

As evening approached we returned to the home of Lobo, where a good fire burning in the centre of the lodge made it quite comfortable except for the smoke that nearly blinded us; but by lying down on our blankets we found we could avoid this discomfort.

Tom dropped in for a few minutes to see how we were getting along and to tell us that under the stimulating influence of the whiskey I had

brought the old chief was showing a decided improvement.

Two women had for some time been busy cooking a meat stew in a kettle that hung over the fire. After a time I brought out and gave them some coffee, sugar, and hardtack that I had brought in my saddle pocket to add to the meal. After lifting the big kettle off the fire, the women, with a great horn spoon, ladled out a dishful of the stew to each of the guests first, and then to Lobo.

We ate hungrily. Lobo was the last one to "throw up the sponge" and announce his perfect satisfaction by a prolonged Indian grunt, and then as he leaned back against a pile of bedding, he added: "Muy wano!"

Before eating I had handed a plug of tobacco to Lobo, who had whittled off enough to fill a great red-stone pipe and then returned the plug to me. I tried to induce him to keep the plug, but he declined. As Tom had intimated would be the case, a number of men dropped in after supper to call on Lobo and his white visitors, and the big red pipe was then brought out, lit with a coal of fire, and put on its travels, each taking a puff and passing it to the next.

The Indians evidently appreciated the free tobacco I was furnishing, for the pipe was soon smoked out, refilled, and emptied again and again, till all were fully sated. After this some talk was indulged in, and then the visitors went out one

by one, till only the captain and I and Lobo's family remained. Saunders and I soon after removed our coats and boots and turned in.

During the evening the woman had carried in several armfuls of wood and piled it convenient to the fire in the centre of the lodge, and, the weather being quite cold, she got up several times during the night to replenish the fire.

Saunders and I were both awake by daylight, but, as our host and his family and the dogs still seemed soundly sleeping, we kept our bed for a time to avoid disturbing them. Finally, old Lobo crawled out and, wrapping his buffalo robe around him, went outside the lodge. In a few minutes we heard him, in a loud voice, haranguing the camp, and a few minutes later the camp was all astir.

After breakfast, on telling Lobo that we wished to return to our camp, two of his boys drove the herd into camp and roped our animals, which were quickly saddled and packed.

I took the remains of the plug of tobacco and the packages of sugar, coffee, and hardtack out of our saddle pockets, carried them into Lobo's lodge, and laid them down.

Captain Saunders, feeling disposed to reward the two boys for taking care of our animals, offered each a silver half dollar. Their young eyes brightened at sight of the money, for they knew it would buy them something nice at the trader's

store, but a hesitating glance at Lobo seemed to decide them to refuse the proffered gifts, and with a pleasant, "No quiero, señor" ("Don't want it, sir"), which their looks belied, they turned away.

"Give them to me, captain," I said, "and I'll place them where they won't reject the money." I carried the two silver pieces into the lodge and put them with the other things. No objection was made to my leaving these presents where they could be found, but Indian hospitality forbade them openly to accept gifts from a guest.

At dinner Jack proposed that Captain Saunders and he should go out that afternoon and kill some buffalo and put out some poison. The captain was eager to go, for he was quite without experience in this form of sport. After Saunders was armed, equipped, and mounted he and Jack rode away and I turned to and attended to the dinner dishes.

It was near sunset when they got back to camp, reporting that they had killed and poisoned some buffalo, and Captain Saunders had killed also an antelope, the carcass of which he had tied on behind his saddle and brought in.

"L'ave the captain alone for the makin's of a plainsman," exclaimed Jack as he dismounted and began unsaddling. "He'll need but little more instruction from any of us. He catches on quick. He'll soon be like an old hand at the

business. An' that horse of his is all right, too. Ain't a bit afeard of a buffalo an' goes at 'em like he was used to it."

"Possibly the captain has had more experience of this kind," I suggested inquiringly, "than we have supposed."

"Not a bit of it," replied Saunders. "This is actually my first glimpse of frontier life; but I have always been interested in such matters and have read everything I could find on the subject and have talked to old plainsmen and in that way have acquired some ideas of such things. I wish I could stay with you a week or two and hunt buffalo and antelope, for it is noble sport; but this isn't what Uncle Sam is paying me for, and I must go back to Fort Larned to-morrow. Still, I consider this time well spent, for the experience I am getting out here is certainly valuable to one who expects to do service on the plains."

"We shall be sorry to lose your company, captain," I replied; "but, if you are going in to-morrow, why not take your antelope along as a trophy of the trip? The weight will not be much, and we can fit it behind the cantle of your saddle and tie it on so it will ride nicely."

"Yes," added Jack, "but that will have to be done to-night, for it'll freeze hard before morning, and then you can't fit it on. I'll fix it now."

He placed Saunders's saddle upon some sacks of grain, bent the antelope carcass to fit snugly be-

hind the cantle, tying the feet down to the cinch rings, and left it to freeze in that position.

After supper Jack played the fiddle awhile, and we sang some songs; but Saunders seemed more interested in drawing us out to tell of our soldier experiences on the frontier and kept us yarn spinning till late bedtime. In the morning, after breakfast, he struck the trail for Fort Larned.

CHAPTER XX

WE TRADE WITH INDIANS

FOR the next week or two, although the weather had turned stormy, Jack and I put in all the time we could at poisoning and skinning wolves. It was now getting well along in February—nearing the close of the season for taking pelts. We had already taken about twenty-five hundred and were anxious to make our winter's catch an even three thousand before quitting.

Tom's patient, old To hausen, had so far recovered that Tom had returned to our camp, but still made an occasional visit to the Kiowa village, where, on account of his success in treating the old chief and others, his services as medicine-man were now much sought by the afflicted Indians, to the utter neglect of old Broken Nose, their own medicine-man, who seemed jealous of Tom's popularity.

One day Jack had gone out alone, riding old Vinegar the buckskin bronco, to kill some buffalo, and in a short time he came back to camp afoot, carrying his saddle and bridle.

"What's happened? Where's Vinegar?" we asked anxiously.

"Vinegar's done for—dead," he answered as he threw down the saddle and bridle, "an' I'm in big luck myself to be here to tell it. It was this way: I was chasin' a bull, an' shot him but had got too close or the bronco was too slow turnin' to get away—anyway the bull got his head under Vinegar an' heaved both him an' me into the air, an' we come down in a heap; but by good luck the buffalo went on without stopping to make further fight, or he might easy have finished both of us. I scrambled to my feet, Vinegar still lying where he fell, with his paunch ripped open an' entrails hanging out. With a great effort he got up onto his feet, but his insides were hanging to the ground, and there he stood a-looking at me pleading like an' a-groaning as much as to ask me to put him out of his misery, which was all I could do for him; so I put my pistol to his head and finished him."

On Tom's next trip to the Kiowa camp, on mentioning to old To hausen the bronco's being killed, the old chief had his herd driven in, and selecting a good pony—one he had used in his ambulance and so knew its working qualities—he insisted on Tom's taking it to replace Vinegar.

About this time, the weather having apparently settled for a mild spell, Captain Saunders and Wild Bill came over from the post on their way to the Kiowa village.

Since returning from nursing the old chief, Tom

had said little about the ill feeling that he had stirred up in old Broken Nose, the Kiowa medicine-man, but, overhearing a conversation between him and Wild Bill, I learned that Tom was feeling uneasy about this. He suspected that Broken Nose had sent a message to Satank which, he feared, boded us no good. He asked Bill to try to find out something about it.

After their return next day, at supper Tom informed us that while at To hausen's camp Bill had discovered that old Broken Nose had really sent to Satank a secret message, the bearer of which had not returned. Bill could not learn what the message was, but from the old Indian's evident hostility toward Tom, and from certain unfriendly remarks he had been heard to make concerning our killing so many buffalo and other game, there were good reasons to suspect that his purpose was to stir up Satank's well-known animosity toward the whites in general, and direct his attention to us in particular, in order to even up with Tom by bringing the hostiles down on us.

Some of To hausen's people had told Bill, in a friendly way, to warn us to be sure to close up our work and get away from here, or else look out for trouble from Satank's band as soon as the new grass began to come; but they did not seem to think that Satank's horses would be in condition for him and his warriors to make a raid on us before the grass got up.

The fact that a few of To hausen's followers denied the report that Broken Nose was trying to make trouble for us led Bill to conclude that some of them were not so friendly to us as they pretended. After stating the situation, Tom went on: "Bill says it ain't likely that Satank will be in a condition to make any move for two or three weeks yet, and by that time we'll be done skinning wolves and out of here; but there's a possibility that the old rascal may make a forced march, in order to catch us before we can get away. In that case we may have to fight. He might be able to find a few of his ponies that are able to travel and mount a party of his men and ride over here to see what we're doing; or, if he and his bucks get very anxious for a row, they might make the trip afoot. Anyway, from now on, we've got to keep a sharp lookout for Injuns or fresh signs in this neighborhood, an' also a close watch of To hausen's camp; for if Satank should come over this way he'd be apt to go there first thing. To hausen himself an' most of his people are friendly to us, but it's more'n likely that some of 'em'll be ready to give Satank any information about us that he wants."

Wild Bill had seemed rather serious and thoughtful this night—and it was so uncommon for him to remain serious long at a time that it attracted my attention—and as we were about to turn in he remarked:

"Boys, as Tom says, it's best to be prepared for emergencies, and if anything serious should happen to you, such as Satank an' his warriors a-looming up of a sudden and a-jumping your camp or corralling you, an' you could manage to send word to me, the captain an' I'll mount some of his soldiers and come right over. Now, I'll tell you how you can send me word"—untying a bead necklace which he wore around his neck. "I'll leave this with you. Hang it somewheres handy, and if you have need of help just write a few words on a slip of paper, tie it 'round the necklace, then hold the necklace to Found's nose and let him get the scent; then tie it 'round his neck, point to the fort, and say to him: 'Go to Bill!' He'll savvy, for he's been trained to it, and he'll go a-flying till he gets to my quarters. Now, mind you, you may not have any occasion to send for me at all; you're likely to finish up your wolf skinning an' get away from here before Satank gets around; but if anything should happen that you need us, do as I've told you, an' we'll come a-curling and help you out. Is it a whack, Cap?" appealing to Saunders.

"It is," replied the captain, "and to be prepared for such a call—though I hope they'll have no occasion to make it—I'll have an understanding with the major when I get back, so that if it should come in the night I will be allowed to take my company out of the post as quickly as possible,

without calling on him or disturbing the rest of the garrison."

"That's a good idea," added Bill. "It'll save a heap of time."

"Well," said old Tom, "we'll try an' not put the captain an' Bill to so much trouble unless it's a case of dire necessity. I hardly think that Satank will make war on us, an' if he should, we're pretty well fixed for fighting an' can give him a good tussle before we call on our neighbors for help."

"I'm not scared about it," replied Bill, "an' I know you boys ain't, for this is just an emergency arrangement. But I tell you right now, Tom, if there's any fighting an' you don't give me a show I won't like you for it."

I took the bead necklace and hung it in a conspicuous place on the wall, little thinking that we would ever have occasion to use it, and sincerely hoping that we would not; but I felt that both Bill and Tom, who understood Indian ways best, really anticipated trouble with them and were mentally preparing to meet it.

After the departure of our guests next morning each of us went about his accustomed duties as usual.

After several days had passed and nothing had occurred to arouse our uneasiness we gradually regained our accustomed assurance, but I know that while out hunting or skinning wolves I was

more keenly watchful than formerly, and several times on returning to camp I had noticed Tom coming down from the nearest bluff with the field-glass in his hand, indicating that he had been scanning the surrounding country.

I noticed, too, that lately, whenever the team was sent over to the fort, in addition to the usual batch of baled wolfskins, Tom was now sending other stuff, such as surplus grain and provisions—anything, in fact, that could be dispensed with in the camp and reduce our outfit, as he said, to "light marching order," for we thought now in a couple of weeks more we would be ready to break up camp and go in.

Of the three, Jack was by far the most indifferent, for, as he said, "It's time enough to bid the divil good morning when you meet him."

Since To hausen's band had located near us we had had frequent visits from some of his people, when the weather was fair, and had struck up quite a profitable trade with them for buffalo robes, dressed deer and antelope skins, with a few otter, beaver, panther, wildcat skins, and the like, paying for them in coffee, sugar, flour, or tobacco. And since returning from his attendance on the old chief Tom made it a point to visit him every few days, ostensibly to see how the old fellow was getting along, but more particularly to try to find out if any intercourse was passing between Satank's band and To hausen's.

To hausen seemed sincere in his efforts to befriend Tom and, so far as he could, kept Tom informed; but for obvious reasons he had to be secret about it. Not much going and coming between the two bands was to be expected, however, for the weather was still quite severe and stormy a great part of the time, the distance between the two camps considerable, and Indian ponies at this season of the year were poor and weak.

In our traffic with the old chief's people we had given them a liberal exchange for their skins and peltries—far more than they would have received from the traders—we being satisfied with about one hundred per cent. profit on the goods we traded them instead of three to four hundred per cent. as was the custom with men regularly engaged in the trade.

The Indians were not slow to see that we were giving them more for their stuff than they usually received from the traders, and our commerce with them increased. Soon we found that we were gathering in so much of this material that it became a serious question how we were going to smuggle it into our storeroom at Fort Larned, or beyond there, without Weisselbaum's knowledge, or, in case we sold our skins to him, how to account for those we had traded from the Indians. He had a trader's license from the government, and we had nothing of the kind. According to law, we were trespassing on his rights, in which

the commanding officer at Fort Larned was in duty bound to protect him. When we began trading with the Indians we had not thought of these difficulties, but, having got into it, we determined to bluff it out and trust to luck for some future plan to suggest itself to us for getting through.

CHAPTER XXI

JACK'S CLOSE CALL

ON the plains a prairie fire is always something to be dreaded, for with the usual breeze, which often amounts to a gale, a fire in heavy, dry grass is almost invariably uncontrollable and a source of terror to the luckless traveller who happens to be in its track.

Such a fire originates most commonly from the embers of a camp-fire—left by some careless or inexperienced traveller—blown by a rising wind out into the adjacent dry grass or, in the spring of the year, by fires purposely set out in the old grass by the Indians to clear the ground for the next crop.

An essay might be written on prairie fires and the dangers from them and on the best means of fighting them. I have now only to tell of how one of us was caught in one.

For the next few days after Wild Bill and Captain Saunders had left us we were all busy taking in wolf pelts. The season was fast passing, and we yet lacked several hundred skins of the three thousand that we had declared that we would gather before quitting.

One cold, windy day, when a gale was blowing from the northwest, Jack started out alone and afoot—he said it was too cold and windy to ride—to kill a few buffalo wolf baits.

Crossing the creek below the beaver dam, to look for buffalo in the prairie beyond, he soon passed out of sight, while Tom and I busied ourselves taking up the dried skins and baling them. We heard the report of Jack's carbine occasionally and knew by the direction of the sounds that he was to windward of camp—about northwest.

After Jack had been out for some time Tom took the field-glass and went up onto the bluff south of our camp, from which he could view the prairie north of the creek.

He gazed long and intently through the glass in Jack's direction and presently started back to camp on a run.

I knew that something unusual was up. We had heard no uncommon firing from Jack, but, on seeing Tom hurrying down the hill, my thought was: "Indians about or Jack's in trouble." Dropping my work, I rushed down into the dugout, seized both rifles, and, with a few blocks of cartridges, ran back up onto the bank again, looking first toward Tom and then to the timber north of us. There was no sign or sound of an enemy.

When the old man arrived, breathless from running, he noted my preparations for war and gasped out as fast as he could catch his breath:

"No! no Injuns! See the big smoke over the tree tops? Prairie's all afire out that way! Comin' fast! I'm afraid Jack's caught in it. I saw him just before I noticed the fire. He was out in the bottom 'bout midway between the timber and the lodge-pole trail, a-working on a buffalo he'd killed, and just then I noticed a lone Injun riding along the trail the other side of Jack; and I saw the infernal rascal halt when he got right to windward of Jack, and dismount and squat down in the grass; and then come a puff of smoke and the prairie was afire. And then the Injun got on his pony and galloped along the trail a piece and fired the grass again. And this he repeated several times. The cuss had seen Jack and fired the grass to try to burn him up, and I'm afraid he's done it, for I don't see how Jack could escape without he could fly, for when I left the bluff the fires had all run together and were a-coming toward Jack like a race-horse, in a wall of flames that seemed to leap twenty feet high at times."

"What can we do, Tom?" I asked. "Can't we do something to help him?"

"I don't see what we can do," replied the old man with a look of despair, "but you run down to the stable and clap the saddle onto Prince, and be ready to go and look for what's left of him soon as the fire burns out. It'll stop when it gets to the creek and quick as the smoke clears away so's you can stand it, you be ready to light out."

I rushed to the stable and he followed me, talking as I saddled up.

"Near as I could make him out through the glass, I believe it's that infernal old Broken Nose that's done this job. It looked some like him and I noticed he climbed on and off his pony like an old man."

I soon had Prince saddled and led him up onto the bank, where we impatiently waited what seemed an endless time but was really only a few minutes.

The fire was now roaring and crackling just beyond the strip of timber bordering the creek. The smoke would probably have been stifling in our camp by this time, but on striking the timber the wind had given it an upward pitch that sent most of it above us.

The fire kept up such a roaring and rushing noise that I began to fear that the wind might carry some of it across the creek, but as soon as it entered the timber on the north side, where the grass was shorter, a marked subsidence was apparent.

I mounted and moved up to the south bank of the creek, anxious to be off on my search for Jack, but a dense cloud of smoke and flying ashes whirled through the trees from the burnt ground for some minutes after the fire seemed to have exhausted its fury, and, impatient as I was, I yet had to wait before venturing to enter the burnt district. As soon as I could endure it I crossed

the creek and started, still half blinded and choked by the flying smoke and ashes, which so obscured my vision that I could see but a short distance ahead. The fire now was all gone except here and there a few buffalo-chips still burning, but the hot smoke-and-ashes-laden air was stifling.

I struck a gallop, to hurry through the worst part of the ground, and soon began to get out into a little clearer atmosphere, and was greatly rejoiced to see Jack coming toward me though yet some distance off. I noticed that though he was coming with the wind he walked unsteadily, as though nearly exhausted, stopping now and then to sit down and rest. The air was yet so murky that he had not noticed me until I came near him, when, staggering to his feet from an old buffalo skull he had been sitting on, he waved his hand weakly and tried to whoop, but the effort set him to coughing as he halted and leaned on his rifle. As I reached him I noticed that his wolfskin overcoat that he wore at starting from camp was missing and his other clothes were much soiled, apparently having been wet in places, coated with adhering soot and ashes, and now frozen by the cold wind.

"Why, Jack!" I exclaimed as I reined up and dismounted, "how in the world did you live through the fire? And how did you get your clothes wet?"

"In the buffalo," he answered as he again began coughing.

"In what?" I asked in perplexity. "In a buffalo?"

As he attempted to explain, still coughing, I interrupted him with:

"Never mind, Jack; don't try to talk. I savvy. Here, let me help you on Prince, and when we get to camp you can tell us all about it."

Helping him on the horse, I walked alongside of him to camp, but insisted that he should not try to talk until his lungs got clear of the smoke and ashes he had inhaled.

When he had answered my questions as to how he had escaped the fire and got his clothes wet by replying, "In the buffalo," I was at first puzzled; but gradually the explanation dawned on me. He had tried the exploit I had read of to him and Tom the other night out of Cooper's "The Prairie."

On reaching camp I hurriedly told Tom of Jack's exploit and his condition and suggested that no questions be asked for the present. We helped him into the dugout and put him to bed. I explained to Tom how, as I conjectured, Jack had escaped the fire but the Irishman was not in a condition to tell us about that, though it was with difficulty that we kept him from trying to talk.

By the next forenoon our Irishman was able to talk without much difficulty.

"Well, sir," he began in a weak voice, "I believe it's the closest call I've had this long time,

and I never want to get into such another tight place, where breath is so scarce. I'd killed the buffalo and begun ripping open the hide to skin it back, and just then I got a smell of grass a-burning, and, looking up, I saw in a jiffy what a trap I was in and no way out of it unless I could fly. Suddenly I thought of that skame that Peck read about the other night, and in a minute I was cutting and slashing in blood up to my shoulders.

"I ripped open the throat and cut off the windpipe and cut loose everything around the lights inside as far as I could reach. Then I started in behind the brisket and ripped open the belly and reached in and got a holt of the windpipe and begun pulling the entrails back, and all the time I was too busy to look up to see how nigh the fire was a-getting; but I knew by the smoke thick around me and the roar of the fire that I didn't have any time to fool away.

"When I got the in'ards dragged out I placed my wolfskin coat over the opening I'd made in the breast and then propped up the short ribs and flank with me carbine so's I could crawl in, and in I went, pulling my carbine in after me; and none too soon, either, for the fire was roaring around me and I could smell the wool a-burning in a second after I'd got inside.

"And then's when I begun to smell hell for sure! The little bit of fresh air that was inside the buffalo soon gave way to hot smoke, and oh,

man! it was horrible! I hope I may never come so nigh suffocation again.

"After the fire had passed and I began to breathe again, I felt weak and all gone, like I hadn't strength enough to crawl out of the carcass. I wondthered whether you would ever find my remains. I laid there awhile and by and by I began to feel better, and then I crawfished out backwards. After shaking myself together I says to myself, says I, 'Never say die, Jacky boy! You're better than two dead men yet, so you are!' And picking up my carbine I made a brave stagger for camp, but if you hadn't met me with the horse it's a long time I'd 'a' been getting here, so I would."

CHAPTER XXII

SATANK ARRIVES

EARLY March found us closing up our affairs at the camp, preparatory to starting back to the settlements. We had succeeded in taking a few more than our three thousand wolfskins; and in addition to these we would have nearly a wagonful of bales of the dressed buffalo robes and other skins we had traded for with To hausen's people, together with the beaver, otter, antelope, and other pelts we had taken in our camp.

We had hauled all our baled wolfskins over to Fort Larned and stored them there as fast as they accumulated, but retained in camp for the last load our otter and beaver skins and the peltries we had gotten from the Indians; for we thought it best not to bring these latter under the notice of Weisselbaum, for fear he should make trouble for us for encroaching on his Indian trade.

As a prospective buyer he had kept close watch of our wolfskins, as we stored them, and was anxious to buy our whole catch; but we had stood him off, saying that we thought we could do better with them in Leavenworth. We had heard that

Kitchen's freighting train from New Mexico was on the road, going in empty, and would pass Fort Larned in a few days, and had decided that if we could not get Weisselbaum up to our figures, we would ship them in that way.

After an early dinner, Tom and Jack had started for the fort with the mule team, taking a partial load of the last of our wolfskins—a half dozen bales—and some camp plunder.

I do not think that my comrades were as much alarmed as I was at the thought of the hostiles dropping in on us. They seemed to be borrowing no trouble on that account and, for fear of being ridiculed by them for my cowardly fears, I had kept my thoughts on this subject to myself.

On this day we had all seemed unusually jolly; even Tom's grim features occasionally relaxed into a pleasant smile at some sally from our wild Irishman. Our spirits were high, for we had grown tired of buffalo hunting and wolf skinning, with all the attendant hardships and excitements, and were now eager to get back into "God's country" with our profitable cargo of skins, to reap the reward of our winter's hard work.

As I stood looking after Tom and Jack as they drove away, I thought: "To-morrow they'll be back, and the next morning we'll load up the last of our camp outfit and will soon be beyond the reach of Satank and his crowd."

While still standing on top of our dugout

watching the receding wagon a growl from Found, at my feet, caused me to look down at him; and following the direction of his look, down the ravine toward the timber, I saw an Indian boy afoot stealthily approaching, every now and then casting furtive glances behind him as though fearful that he might be seen by some one in the timber. I at once recognized the boy as one of To hausen's sons and, quieting the dog, awaited his approach. Following a path skirting the edge of the water in the ravine, when he had reached the platform between our dugouts, he again looked cautiously about and beckoned me to come down where he stood.

When I neared him he said in his broken English:

"To hausen, my fadder, he say tell you, 'look out! Satank comin'!'"

And then asked, looking anxiously into my face:

"You savvy?"

"Yes, but where? When?" I hastened to ask excitedly.

"Kin savvy señor," replied the boy, "that all To hausen, he say, that all; 'look out, Satank comin'!' Pretty *pronto*, I 'speck. Now I mus' vamose. Satank he see me here, he kill me."

And quickly turning he sneaked down the ravine till he reached the brush and disappeared.

To say that I was alarmed at the sudden shock to my recent feeling of confidence is to put it mildly; but I realized that there was no time to

waste in idle regrets at the unfortunate turn of affairs. I felt almost helpless and could not decide what to do to prepare for the danger.

Rushing into the dugout I seized my carbine and, going again up onto the dirt roof, I fired several shots in the hope that possibly the sound might reach my companions, who were still in sight, slowly climbing the hill about two miles away. It was no use—the wind was blowing from them to me, and they moved steadily on, evidently not hearing me.

I was hesitating whether to jump on Prince, ride after them and hurry them back to prepare for a probable call from the hostiles when a surly growl and bark from Found drew my attention another way, and I was almost frightened out of my wits to see two mounted Indians coming, one behind the other in single file, along the trail leading from the ford below the beaver dam.

They were on the opposite side of the ravine—the stable side—so I moved down onto the platform between the dugouts, where I would have a better position, still hoping that they would turn out to be some of To hausen's people; but a thrill of something akin to horror ran through me on looking closely at the foremost Indian when he had reached the top of the bank a few feet from me, for I recognized the sinister countenance of Satank.

To let him know that I recognized him and

understood his probable feelings toward me, I swung my carbine into a threatening position and called out, "Halt!" at the same time making the sign to him to stop where he was.

He halted at the command, as did the other Indian in the rear, and, while keeping a close watch on both to see that they drew no gun on me, I demanded in a defiant tone:

"Halloo, Satank, what do you want here?"

Satank made no reply, but motioned his companion to his side.

I recognized the man as a half-breed, called Mexican Joe, who had sometimes been used as an interpreter at Fort Wise. Joe was evidently to act as interpreter now.

In my defiant attitude and speech I was assuming much more self-confidence than I really felt; but I wished to impress them that I distrusted them, understood their intentions, and was prepared to stand them off or fight. However, neither of the savages made any threatening movement—the time was not ripe for declaring war—they had evidently come on a reconnoitring expedition.

As soon as the interpreter had moved up to him Satank spoke a few words to Mexican Joe, who asked in broken English:

"Where your pardners? Other mans? Where wagon?"

"Gone down to To hausen's camp," I said.

"He say, 'Maybe so you lie,'" said Joe, making

the sign of the forked tongue; then continued, "Any mans in casa—house?" nodding toward the dugout.

"Yes," I replied.

Apparently wishing to see the inside of our house—or to get the drop on me in some way—after a few more words between them, Joe said:

"He say: 'White man come to Kiowa's camp Kiowa feed him. Satank he hungry. Want to go in casa, eat with white man—be good amigos.'"

I replied:

"Food all gone. Pardners gone with wagon to bring some buffalo meat. Tell him to come again when pardners get back. I'll give him plenty to eat."

Of course, Satank did not believe this, and I did not care. I wished to stand him off, for I was determined that he should get no closer inspection of our situation than he already had. I felt sure that he had a party of his warriors close about—probably in hiding in the timber—and that he had come on a spying tour.

Satank evidently recognized me as one of the actors in an episode that took place at Fort Wise when I was in the service, and asked a number of questions about it. To all these I replied by denying any knowledge of the event. The interpreter said, however:

"He say: 'You can't fool him. He know you.'"

I was in dread all the time that they might lift

their eyes to the upland prairie in the direction of Fort Larned, where our white-covered wagon was still in plain view; but a little swell of the prairie hid it from them.

After exchanging a few more words in their own language, Joe turned to me and said:

"Adios, good-by, señor. We go—vamose."

Backing away a few steps, they turned off around the butt of our haystack, and made for the crossing of the ravine just above our dugouts. Here they examined the ground closely, evidently looking for fresh tracks of our wagon and mules to see which way they had gone.

As soon as they crossed the ravine I returned to my station on the dirt roof of our dugout where I could watch their movements. When they reached the higher ground and our Fort Larned trail the fresh tracks of the team gave them their clew. Pointing to the fresh signs, Satank's eyes followed the course of the trail until he caught sight of the wagon in the distance, just as it seemed to reach the crest of the high prairie about three miles away. With an excited exclamation he pointed out his discovery to his companion, and then mounting rode off at a lively gait.

I conjectured that Satank would either pursue the wagon or bring his men to attack my position —probably both. In either case it was of the utmost importance that I warn my comrades, which now seemed an impossibility; and while

fretting at my helplessness I looked down at Found, at my feet, and the inspiration came.

"Good!" I shouted, "I'll send the dog!"

Rushing down into the cabin I seized a piece of paper and hastily wrote on it:

Look out for Satank and his gang! They are after you! I am O. K., so far.

PECK.

Quickly tying this slip to Found's collar and taking down an old cap of Tom's from which to give the dog the scent, I hurried back on top of the dugout. I spoke to the dog and then pointed to the covered wagon, still plainly visible, and for fear he did not see it I lifted him up in my arms, pointed again to the far-off wagon, repeating the names, "Tom—Jack!"

The intelligent creature looked up into my face, as I set him down, and then at the wagon, barked and wagged his tail vigorously as though he thought he understood me. I then pointed again to the wagon, held Tom's old cap to his nose, and said, "*Go to Tom,*" motioning with my hand toward the wagon.

Found looked carefully all around, as though to see if there were any Indians about, and then instead of following the wagon tracks, as I supposed he would, he started down into the bottom of the ravine, the head of which led toward the wagon;

"Go to Tom."

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and after going a few rods, stopped and looked inquiringly back at me, as if to ask: "Am I right?"

"Yes, yes," I answered impatiently as I motioned him away, "go to Tom! go to Tom!"

The dog seemed now fully to comprehend my wishes, and lit out up the ravine on a lively run, now and then disappearing from my view for a moment in the sinuosities of the gulch.

I turned to go down into the cabin to get the field-glass, the better to watch the progress of the dog, and in doing so I instinctively cast my glance in the direction of the point of timber where Satank and Joe had entered a few moments before, and there saw a party of mounted Indians hurrying out of the woods and starting across the prairie after the team.

The Kiowas were about as near the wagon as Found, and it seemed that it would be a close race between the dog and Indians as to which would reach the team first. With the field-glass I watched the advance of Indians and dog with excited anxiety. The pursuers and my messenger had entered broken ground between the creek valley and the upland, and I could catch only occasional glimpses of them. To get a better view I climbed up on the derrick, where we usually hung our fresh meat, which gave me a few feet more of elevation. I tried to count the Indians as they started in pursuit of the wagon and made out that they numbered about forty.

I had watched first Found and then the Kiowas through the glass until the dog had proceeded so far that he had passed out of sight on the upland, still running; and the Indians could only be seen at intervals; but I could not tell which was nearer the wagon. The Indians were approaching it from the right and rear, while Found would be coming from nearly behind. Tom and Jack, I knew, would be sitting on the seat in the wagon, under cover of the sheet, unsuspicious of danger; the rattling of the wagon would drown any noise of the galloping Indians; and their first intimation of the presence of the Kiowas—unless Found reached them in time—would be a volley of bullets and arrows as the redskins surrounded them.

I focussed my glass steadily on the white wagon cover, knowing that the halting or turning of the team would indicate that my messenger or the pursuers had reached them. If Found got there first the team would stop; Tom and Jack would discover the Indians and then quickly jump out, unhook the mules and tie them to the wheels of the wagon; and then I would hear the reports of their rifles first. If the Indians got there first and surprised my comrades I would probably hear the reports of the Kiowas' rifles before the wagon stopped, and the frightened mules would then start on a run.

Riveting my gaze on the wagon, I was presently

gratified to notice it halt, and a moment later the two familiar reports of Sharp's carbines assured me that they, Tom and Jack, had got my warning and had fired the first shots.

"Good!" I shouted when I heard their rifles. "Ten to one an Indian saddle or two was emptied by those shots!"

Then a straggling rattle of firearms, with now and then the report of a Sharp's, indicated that the fight was on. The bobbing up and down of the heads of galloping Indians passing between me and the wagon showed that the redskins were circling around the team; and as they passed to right and left of the wagon they seemed to be keeping a respectful distance.

The firing slackened. Just then some mounted men and animals came running in my direction, and as they came near enough to be distinguishable through the glass I made out that the two team mules had gotten away from Tom and Jack, after being unhitched from the wagon, and were now making for camp, chased by a number of Kiowas. The Indians soon caught the mules and led them back.

The firing had now nearly ceased. Of the wagon I could only see the white cover. The Indians seemed to have formed a circle around my comrades and were probably waiting for night to enable them to crawl up near enough to make their rifles effective. This they could do in the dark-

ness, and by digging rifle-pits at close range around the wagon they would have Tom and Jack under a circle of rifle fire by daylight.

CHAPTER XXIII

SURROUNDED BY KIOWAS

AS the shades of evening crept over the plain it became impossible for me to see anything distinctly. The occasional reports of their carbines assured me that my companions were still standing off the savages.

I kept asking myself: "What can I do to help them?" But there was no reply.

I had no inclination to eat or sleep but prepared for a long, dismal night of watchfulness. After attending to the horses in the stable I went into our dugout and carried out some blankets and a buffalo robe, and, making a snug bed in the remains of our haystack, where I could command a pretty good view of our camp and surroundings, I settled down for a long night of torturing anxiety.

I had scarcely got settled when a slight noise from up the ravine attracted my attention, and, quickly jumping to the conclusion that some of the Indians were already looking for me, I strained eyes and ears to locate the one who had made the noise.

I soon discerned a dark object coming down the hollow, but, instead of the catlike tread of an ap-

proaching Indian, with rushing gallop and joyous bark Found came bounding up to me. In the semidarkness I saw something whitish about his neck, which I knew must be a message from Tom and Jack.

Rushing into the dugout, I lit a candle, and, untying from Found's collar a piece of paper, I read Tom's hastily scrawled note:

PECK: *The Injuns have got us corralled and got the mules. Both of us wounded but not bad. Laying under the wagon with the bales of wolf skins around us. Send us a few carbine cartridges by Found, and put Bill's necklace on him, so we can send him on for Bill. Look out for yourself.* TOM.

"No time to be lost," I said to myself; and, sitting down, I quickly wrote on the reverse side of Tom's note:

BILL: *Come quick with soldiers. Tom and Jack are about three miles out on Larned trail. Read other side. I am O. K. at camp, so far.* PECK.

I fed the good dog, and, tying up four packs of Sharp's rifle cartridges—ten in a pack—in an old handkerchief, I made ready to send Found off. I first intended to tie the package around his neck but decided that he could more easily carry it by the mouth.

I tied my note to his collar, gave him a secure hold of the handkerchief of cartridges in his teeth,

and taking down Bill's bead necklace from the wall I held it to his nose a moment to give him the scent, repeating as I did so, "Go to Bill! Go to Bill!" according to his master's instructions.

Found wagged his tail and looked at me as though he understood my wishes. I felt sure he would first go to Tom and Jack, who would take the cartridges, read my note to Bill, take off the necklace and give him a fresh scent, and send him on to the fort.

The tired dog had before him a long and dangerous run of about twenty miles, during which he would have to pass twice through the cordon of watchful Indians surrounding my comrades; but it was the only hope of saving the men, and Found seemed able and willing for the undertaking.

I felt confident that if the Kiowas did not kill or cripple him, Found would make the trip quickly. He had already evaded the Indians in returning to camp, and I felt strong hopes that his almost human intelligence would carry him through.

Found's first move on going out of the dugout was to go up on the roof and stand there for a little while sniffing the air. Then he turned and trotted to the ravine, up which he went at a run.

My nest in the hay was a good enough point for observation but not for defence, but I went back there to think things over.

The waning moon would rise about midnight. If the Indians waited till then before attacking I

should command a somewhat clearer view of my surroundings.

I thought that the dog should reach the wagon in an hour after leaving me and felt sure that it would not be long after that before he set out on his longer run to the fort. This should take two or three hours, and I could only guess the time that would be occupied in awakening Bill and his dressing and rousing Saunders and then getting out Saunders' company. It seemed to me the troops ought to be on the way by midnight at the latest, and they ought to reach my companions in two hours from that time.

I had heard no shots from the direction of the wagon since dark, but a long time after the dog had left me, and while I was watching for the rising moon, I heard a shot or two, apparently from the rifles of the Indians, with no reply from the guns of my comrades. I supposed—rightly, as I afterward learned—that Found had reached the wagon and that the two men, by lighting matches to read my note, had drawn the fire from the Indians. On the other hand, it seemed to me possible that the Indians might have seen the dog and killed him.

At length a little light appeared in the east. The moon was about to rise, and it must be after midnight. When the moon looked over the tops of the timber and the light grew, I began to scrutinize objects in my vicinity and thought that a

little way down the ravine I saw something like a wolf. It seemed to change its position a little several times, but remained too long in one place to be a wolf.

I was considering going into the dugout to get the field-glasses but had not yet moved when suddenly a streak of fire, rocket-like, shot up from the object I had been looking at, described a graceful curve, and struck in the hay a few feet from me. It was a fire-arrow shot by an Indian, to set fire to the haystack. The Indian could not have known that I was lying in the hay but thought that by firing it he would draw me out of the dugout and in the light of the fire would get a good shot at me.

I knew it would be folly to try to extinguish the blaze that at once sprang up. I jumped up, gathing blankets and buffalo robes in my arms, to run across to the dugout, and as I rose and showed up against the blaze I heard the crack of a rifle, and felt the shock of a bullet in the bundle in my arms. I was not hurt and dashed for the cabin door, and as I entered on a run I heard the report of another rifle from up the ravine and the spat of the bullet on the door-frame. The hay was now burning briskly, but I felt no anxiety for our horses in the stable almost under the fire, for the thick dirt roof protected them.

I closed and barred the door and then scrambled through the tunnel up into the tent and looked out

through a port-hole which gave a good view for fifty yards up and down the valley.

I caught a glimpse of the Indian who had fired the hay as he looked out from behind a projecting bank, but could not see enough of him to justify shooting in the uncertain light. Of the Indian who had come near hitting me as I entered the cabin, I could see nothing. As I turned to look again at the first Indian I saw him stealthily move out from his concealment, crouching down, apparently peering at the cabin door. Pushing the muzzle of my carbine through the port-hole in front of me, I took as careful aim at him as I could and fired. I saw that I had hit him, for he dropped his rifle, fell, and rolled into the water but quickly scrambled back to his hiding-place and did not again show himself; but the flash of my rifle had been seen by my watchful neighbor up the ravine, who an instant later sent a bullet through the top of the tent over my head.

Presently the hay burned out and only the faint light of the moon showed the indistinct objects to me. Still I could see well enough up and down the ravine so that neither Indian could approach the door of the dugout without being seen. I had been standing on a bale of skins, which enabled me to look out of the port-hole, but now got down and cut another port-hole near the bottom of the tent, so that while lying protected by the bales I could watch for the flash of my neighbor's gun when

next he fired. I could not see that the other Indian had attempted to recover his rifle and was disposed to think that my first shot had perhaps made him no longer dangerous.

While still lying among the bales of fur, looking out of the new port-hole I had cut, my neighbor up the gulch sent another bullet through the tent, above me, that would have hit me if I had remained in my former position.

I fired at the flash of his gun, but could not tell whether I had done him any harm. At all events, he seemed discouraged, for no more shots came from either Indian.

The hole I had cut near the bottom of the tent was on the east side, facing the stable door. The two doors of the tent were on the north and south sides. These I untied and propped a little open so that I could look out either way occasionally; I saw no further signs of activity of the enemy, and toward morning, as the air grew cold, I cut the thongs that bound a bale of buffalo robes and made a fairly comfortable bed, whence I could keep a sharp lookout.

It was a long, dreary, wretched night of anxiety. The soldiers did not come, and without them I could see no hope of escape for my comrades or myself.

As everything seemed so quiet in my vicinity I slipped down into the dugout, through the tunnel, and brought up some more cartridges and some food and cold coffee.

On looking out of my port-hole again I noticed with a hopeless feeling that daylight was fast coming and as yet no sign or sound of the hoped-for rescuers.

Suddenly I detected the sound of tramping horses' feet, and springing to my feet to get a better view out of the tent door, I looked in the direction from which the sounds came and could see indistinctly a party of mounted men, on the trot, skirting along the foot of the bluffs just southeast of camp, as though intending to pass it from the direction of To hausen's village.

"Could they be a reinforcement of Kiowas going to join Satank's party?" I asked myself. "No, they were keeping too well closed up for Indians. It must be Captain Saunders' company, and they have somehow missed the trail that would have taken them to the besieged wagon. But why don't they come here, instead of going by on the trot?"

While putting these puzzling questions to myself I was standing with the folds of the tent door slightly parted, peeping out stealthily, lest the bullet of my lurking foe might find me. When the party of mounted men were nearly opposite our tent I noticed one from the head of the column branch off and strike a gallop in my direction, and a moment later the welcome voice of Wild Bill called out:

'Halloo, Peck, are you still a-kicking?"

Answering him with an affirmative shout, I

stepped out, forgetting for the moment the Indian who was watching for a shot at me. He failed to take advantage of the opportunity, for he saw that he was trapped and made a dash up out of the ravine and ran for the nearest point of bushes just back of our burned haystack.

I called to Bill, who was on the same side of the ravine as the fleeing Kiowa:

"Head him off, Bill! Kill him! Kill him!"

The scout instantly turned his horse and dashed after the Indian, who, seeing that he could not reach the brush before being overtaken, halted, turned, took deliberate aim at the oncoming horseman, and fired.

Down went horse and rider in a heap. The Kiowa dropped his rifle, drew his knife, and started forward to finish his fallen foe. As Bill was now between me and the Indian I was afraid to fire for fear of hitting my friend, who, I saw, was struggling to free himself from his dead horse. I ran across the ravine to where I thought I could help Bill, and before I reached the top of the bank on the other side I heard a shot and then Bill's war-whoop.

When I got in sight of them again Bill was still lying down, one foot under his dead horse, and the Kiowa was lying a few feet from him.

I rushed to him and helped to free him from his horse. On getting on his feet he assured me that he was not hurt, and then, looking toward the

Kiowa and noticing that his enemy was not yet dead, with an exultant war-whoop Bill whipped out his knife, sprang to his dying foe, anxious to scalp him.

I had been so absorbed in this affair that I had not noticed that Captain Saunders with his troopers had turned out of his course and now came galloping up to us; seeing which Bill called out impatiently to the captain, waving him back:

"Don't stop here, Cap! There's only one Injun here, and I've fixed him! We're losing time, and we've lost too much already. I'm afraid them Kiowas out yonder'll get away from us yet. Shove your men along out that way lively."

And then suddenly stopping to listen to a rattle of firearms out toward the wagon, he exclaimed:

"There, do you hear that? Your lieutenant's opening the ball out there right now and them Kiowas'll be coming a-tearing this way in a few minutes. String your men out so's to catch them. I'll overtake you."

"But what will you do for a horse?" asked Saunders as he gave command for moving:

"I'll borrow Peck's black horse."

Saunders immediately put his men on the gallop toward the wagon on the prairie.

Taking Bill's hint of a remount, I rushed to the stable and got Prince out, while he was getting his saddle and bridle off his dead horse; and while hurriedly saddling the black horse Bill was giving

me a brief account of how they came to be here at our camp instead of at the wagon.

"Found come through to Fort Larned on time, all right," he said, "and wanted to come back with me, but I locked him in my room. It took an everlasting time for Saunders to get his company ready to move. Well, after we started, I concluded that the Kiowas would hear us a-coming and get away, unless we could get around in their rear. So I got the captain to divide his men, leaving twenty, under Lieutenant Wilson, to lay around over about Ash Creek hollow until nigh daylight, and then to move up onto the Injuns around the wagon and start them this way, while with the other thirty men we got around on this side of them. We've been riding like the devil, but it was a long ways to go to get around here, and Lieutenant Wilson was to make the attack on his side at daylight, anyway, and he's a-doing it all right."

By this time we had Prince saddled, and, springing onto him, as he galloped after Saunders's party Bill called back to me:

"Keep a sharp lookout, Peck, till we get back here, for there may be some skulkers laying for you in the timber 'round here."

CHAPTER XXIV

CAPTAIN SAUNDERS' FIGHT

GLANCING around as Bill galloped away, I plainly saw, in the bushes at the edge of the timber back of our burnt haystack, two Indian ponies tied to some bushes, with saddles and bridles on. They were the mounts of the two Kiowas who had entertained me throughout the night and one of whom Bill had just killed.

The other fellow, who set fire to the haystack, I supposed had made good his escape.

And, as I thought this, I naturally turned to look at the spot from where he had fired the burning arrow.

"I'm sure I hit him when I shot at him out of the tent," I said to myself. "I wonder if I hurt him much? I'll just step down there and see if there is any blood on the ground."

As I approached the spot I saw something like the end of a dirty blanket showing from behind the jutting bank where he had been concealed, and, fearing that the Indian, wounded, might be lying there waiting to shoot me, I cocked my rifle and crept cautiously around to where I could see behind the projecting bank; and there lay the Indian,

sure enough, but without sign of life. On a nearer approach I found he was dead and cold—probably having bled to death soon after I had shot him.

On turning the body over to get a good look at his face, I was somewhat astonished to recognize the features of old Broken Nose, the medicine-man from To hausen's camp.

Leaving the body where it was, I hurried back to the tent to climb up on the derrick with the field-glass, anxious to see what I could of the fight between the Kiowas and soldiers out on the prairie. There was not much to see.

Saunders' party had been delayed too long in making the détour to get in the rear of the enemy. Lieutenant Wilson had made his attack at daylight, according to orders, and the Indians, abandoning their siege of the wagon, were retreating to the nearest point of the Walnut Creek timber.

From my stand I could see Saunders' party trying to cut off the fleeing Indians from the timber, but they seemed to succeed in intercepting only a few of the hindmost ones. Saunders, Wild Bill, and party went on in pursuit of the fleeing Kiowas until they passed out of sight behind a point of timber.

Turning my glass toward the wagon, I could see a party of soldiers gathered around it. Soon the wagon started moving toward our camp, accompanied by the mounted men. The soldiers must have recaptured the mules and harness.

As the wagon party came down the grade from the upland at a brisk trot, it occurred to me that they would all be as hungry as coyotes, and, rushing down into the dugout, I began doing what I could to prepare something for them to eat.

Lieutenant Wilson came galloping on ahead to tell me the results of the fight at his end of the line, not knowing that I had witnessed nearly all of it through the glass. Jack and Tom, he said, were both wounded, but not seriously. They had killed three Kiowas and two ponies before the soldiers arrived, and the latter had killed five more Indians and captured several ponies in the attack at daylight.

I told the lieutenant what arrangement I had planned for feeding his men—which he said would be satisfactory—and also that we had grain enough to give his horses a feed but no hay.

As the wagon came up I rushed to it to congratulate my comrades on their escape and to ascertain the extent of their injuries.

"Only a few scratches," said Jack indifferently, in spite of his pale looks, as he climbed out of the wagon with his left arm in a sling. "I got an arrow through me arm, but Tom is worse hurted —a bullet through his thigh but no bones broke. Have you anything to eat?"

I helped Tom out and supported him on one side as he hobbled down to the dugout. Meantime, the lieutenant and his troopers were taking care

of their horses, after which some of them unharnessed the mules for us while others started a fire and began to cook their breakfast.

As I entered the dugout with Tom, I noticed my blankets lying on the floor, where I had dropped them on my hurried entry the night before, and after helping the old man to a seat I gathered up the bedding to make him a pallet. In doing this the bullet that old Broken Nose had fired into the bundle dropped to the floor.

"There, Tom," I said as I picked it up and handed it to him, "is a last token from your old friend, Broken Nose."

"What? Has the old rascal been here? Why didn't you kill him?" he asked eagerly.

"I did. He's lying down the ravine yonder, a little way. He and another had me corralled here all night, but I got Broken Nose and Wild Bill got the other."

While I cooked breakfast I told them all about my little affair of the past night.

"While the coffee's a-boiling, lieutenant," said Jack after I had finished, "come on and we'll go and take a look at the dead Injuns. I want to make sure that they're good and dead."

As they started out I called to them:

"While you're at it, go over to the brush yonder, behind the burnt haystack, and bring in the two Indians' ponies. I haven't had time to gather them in yet."

In a little while they returned, bringing the horses and tying them to the wagon.

"You and Bill sure did a good job on them two," said Jack as he and Wilson re-entered the cabin. "I'm only sorry I didn't have the pleasure of doing the business for old Broken Nose myself, for I was owing him that."

We had just finished eating our breakfast when one of the soldiers called out:

"Here comes Wild Bill riding like the devil was after him! Wonder what's up?"

Looking in the direction that Saunders's party had gone, we saw the scout coming back alone, riding rapidly.

When he reached us he said that Captain Saunders and two of his men were wounded, one horse killed and several wounded. One soldier was thought to be fatally hurt; and Bill had come for our team and wagon to haul them to our camp, as the two soldiers were unable to sit on their horses.

We were soon busy hitching up the mules while Bill gave us the particulars of their fight. It appeared that in chasing the fleeing Kiowas, Bill, accompanied by several soldiers, had become separated from Saunders and the main party, and the scout, not being at hand to guide the captain, the latter in his eager pursuit of the enemy had made the mistake of closely following the Indians into the timber, which blunder they had anticipated and had ambushed the soldiers.

"I thought Cap. knew better than that," said Bill, "but it was partly my fault. I knew he'd never fought Injuns before, and I ought to have stayed with him and stopped him short of the brush."

In spite of his crippled condition, old Tom came hobbling out of the dugout, with his little medicine-chest and a bundle of rags under his arm for bandages, and insisted on going with the team to do what he could for the wounded.

Jack's wounded arm prevented him from handling the team, so we left him in camp and I went along to drive the mules. Lieutenant Wilson had received orders to remain at our camp with his detachment until further orders.

After being helped into the wagon, Tom's foresight prompted him to call to me:

"Peck, throw in some bedding and get some grub—sugar, coffee, hardtack, and meat—to take along, and a camp kettle and frying-pan and a few tin cups."

I remembered the bale of buffalo robes I had cut open in the tent the night before for my own comfort and, calling one of the soldiers to help me, brought them out and tumbled them into the wagon, with the desired rations and utensils. I then took the lines and whip and started at a trot, guided by Wild Bill riding alongside.

As we trotted along I asked the scout:

"How many Kiowas did you and Saunders' party kill?"

"The returns are not all in yet," replied Bill, "but I think we got seven or eight. I got three of them for my share. That was all I could catch before they got into the timber; and, of course, when they got to the brush I had to give up the chase and let them go."

"It's most too good a thing to hope that old Satank'll be found among the killed," said Tom.

"No, I'm afraid we'll not find him among them," replied Bill regretfully, "for I reckon his luck has saved him again, unless he may be among them that were killed out near the wagon. If I can get time I'll ride around over the prairie and take a good look at all of them, and the old rascal may be found among them; but I'll be surprised if he is, for he has wonderful luck in getting out of tight places."

"Don't you think, Bill," I asked, "that this was rather a badly managed expedition of old Satank's, considering that he has the reputation of being such a successful raider?"

"Yes, he's made a bad mess of it this time, sure, and a few more such failures'll cause his followers to choose another leader. I think he's losing his grip on the war-path, and we'll soon see Satanta or Big Tree coming to the front as leader of the hostile Kiowas. When what's left of these fellows get back to their big village and count noses, there'll be such a howl against old Satank that I don't believe he'll ever be able to get much of a

following again. You mark what I tell you, Satanta or Big Tree is going to be the war chief of the Kiowas hereafter."

We found Captain Saunders and his men about two miles above our camp, dismounted in the edge of the timber near the old Indian camp, anxiously awaiting our arrival. Saunders himself had his head roughly bandaged with an old handkerchief because of a glancing arrow wound above his right ear, which had bled profusely over his face and clothes but was not serious. His horse had received a bullet in the shoulder which lamed him badly.

Supposing from Saunders' appearance that he was badly hurt, Tom was going to him to dress his wounds when the captain said:

"Never mind me, Mr. Vance; I'm not hurt much; but if you can help poor Dolan there, lying behind that tree, do what you can for him. He is badly hurt—spitting blood and growing weaker—" talking as he led the way to where the wounded man lay. "An arrow went through his breast and lodged in the neck of a horse a couple of rods behind him. I had no idea they could shoot those arrows so viciously."

On examining Dolan's wound, Tom's experience told him that the man was past any help that he could render, for the arrow had gone through the lung, and an inward hemorrhage seemed to be slowly sapping his life. Dressing the wound and

giving the man a stimulant, Tom and the captain consulted together for a moment and then informed the patient that, though his case was quite serious, it was not altogether hopeless and that his only chance was to be hurried back to Fort Larned, where the post surgeon could give him proper attention.

The other man who had been reported wounded had a broken arm. Tom splinted and bandaged it, and the two were soon made comparatively comfortable among the buffalo robes in the wagon. Several others had received slight wounds but were "able for duty."

While this had been going on, Saunders' men had gotten out the grub and utensils, fried some meat and made some coffee and now called us up to eat. This was the first intimation to Saunders that there was such a luxury as food in the outfit, and as he sniffed the pleasant aroma of the boiling coffee he turned to Tom and me and thanked us for our thoughtfulness.

"Captain," said Tom after we had eaten, "it's time that team was on the way to Fort Larned. What are your plans for getting these men there? If I can help you in any way, I'm at your service."

"Thanks," replied Saunders. "My plan is to send a half dozen men along with the wagon as an escort and some responsible man in charge. I will then move down to your camp and, taking

Wilson and party from there, move on down to To hausen's village and try to find out whether his people have been harboring these hostiles; and then to-morrow we'll all move into the fort. I will send a requisition in by the team to bring out some grain for the horses to-morrow and any other supplies that we may need. It will be best that we stay and see you all safely into Fort Larned." Then turning to Wild Bill, he asked: "Do you think, Bill, that six men will be a sufficient escort to go with the wagon and wounded men—do you think there is any danger of their meeting hostile Kiowas?"

"None but dead ones," replied Bill. "The team can go through all right now."

"Well," said Saunders, "I had thought of asking Mr. Vance or Mr. Peck to take charge of the wounded men and see them through."

"Tom'll be the man for that," suggested Bill, "for the wounded men may need some help on the way."

"Well, that's settled," said Tom impatiently, as he started for the wagon without waiting for the captain's decision. "Captain, please detail the escort and start them on after me; they can soon overtake us." And, climbing into the wagon, he took up the whip and lines and started.

The captain quickly mounted the escort and hurried them after the wagon; and then he himself mounted the horse of one of the wounded

men and we set out for our camp, I riding one of the Kiowa ponies captured in the fight.

The horses were a rather scrawny-looking lot, as the Indian ponies generally are at this season of the year—the result of starvation through the winter—but, no doubt, there was in them good mettle that would show itself as soon as the grass came; for the Indian warrior always selects his fleetest and toughest horse to ride when going on the war-path.

Arrived at the camp, Captain Saunders had his men unsaddle and water their horses and picket them out for an hour's rest before starting down to To hausen's village.

Some of Lieutenant Wilson's men had killed several antelope and had cooked up a great lot of the meat, anticipating that Saunders' men would come in hungry, as they did. Saunders, Wilson, Bill, and I adjourned to the dugout to eat the meal Jack had prepared for us.

While we were eating I told Captain Saunders something of my experience of the previous night and exhibited the bullet that old Broken Nose had fired into the bundle of blankets in my arms.

CHAPTER XXV

WE PART FROM FRIENDS

THE captain's party returned from To hausen's village about sunset. He said that he had had an amicable and satisfactory talk with the old chief and his followers, all of whom reiterated their former professions of friendship for the whites and declared that they would have no intercourse with the hostiles.

"We've got to take that," said Wild Bill, who had been interpreter at the talk, "with a grain of salt, for while I was there I found out, by pumping some of their youngsters and women, that they were pretty well posted about the whole affair up to the time that Lieutenant Wilson put in an appearance and stampeded them this morning, which goes to show that a few of To hausen's bucks were with Satank up to that time; and in the stampede these fellows must have skedaddled back to To hausen's camp and told about the fight as far as they had been in it. But they didn't seem to know about our part of the fight up the creek nor about old Broken Nose and this other Indian getting their medicine here. I told them about that part of it. And, to make it appear like

old Nosey had gotten just what was coming to him, I told them that the man who got away with him was the same one that old Nosey had tried to burn up when he set fire to the grass out in the bottom that day."

"Good for you, Bill!" exclaimed Jack. "I don't want to rob Peck of the credit, but it's better to let his people think that I evened up with the old rascal at last."

After supper, as night settled down, the cold wind reminded us of another difficulty that few of us had yet thought of. What were we to do for bedding for the soldiers who had come away from the garrison in a hurry without any thought of being out overnight?

About tattoo the rattling of a wagon was heard out on the trail toward Fort Larned. It seemed impossible that Tom could be coming back from the fort so soon with our mule team, but a wagon was approaching from that direction.

We were all out upon the bank looking and listening and speculating as to who the coming parties could be when we heard the sentry on that side of the grounds challenge: "Halt! Who comes there?" And then, apparently assuming the right to pass upon the credentials of the newcomers without the regulation formality of calling for the sergeant of the guard, the sentry admitted two mounted men, who came cantering up to the camp-fire.

The arrivals were two troopers who reported that a little way behind them two six-mule teams were coming, escorted by a dozen cavalrymen under charge of a sergeant. They had been sent out by the commanding officer, at Tom's suggestion, as quickly as they could be hitched up after our team with the wounded men had arrived at the fort.

In a few minutes the teams and escort came up, admitted by the sentry. We soon learned the results of Tom's trip. The badly wounded soldier, Dolan, had died shortly after Tom's arrival at the post. On reaching the fort Tom drove immediately to the adjutant's office and reported to the commanding officer the result of the fight and the condition of the wounded, and then hurried on to the hospital, followed by the major and several other officers and soldiers, all eager to learn all the particulars.

By this time Tom's wounded leg had made him so lame that he realized the impossibility of his returning to our camp with the supplies; and our mule team, also, was not in condition to return immediately, so he suggested to the major that a couple of six-mule teams be quickly hitched up and started under escort for the camp with rations and feed for Saunders' men and horses; and he very thoughtfully, also, advised sending the blankets of Saunders' troopers, all of which was promptly ordered.

One team would have been ample to have taken the supplies to Saunders, but Tom calculated that by sending two the second team, in the absence of our own, could be used, in returning next day, to move our plunder into the post.

Captain Saunders could not say enough in praise of the old man's forethought and unselfishness. "He is certainly a valuable man among soldiers," he said, "for he always seems to know what to do and how to do it."

"Cap," interjected Wild Bill, "you will please bear in mind that I suggested that Tom was the man to send on that trip."

"So you did," admitted Saunders, "and you certainly knew your man."

I had assigned the use of our tent to Captain Saunders' guard detail; and by stuffing a bale of skins into the mouth of the tunnel under the tripod, to stop the draught, and carrying the other bales outside, they made for themselves very comfortable quarters.

The other men made their beds on the open prairie, outside the tent, with their saddles for pillows; and most of them turned in early, to get out of the cold night wind and from weariness, while a few still sat around the camp-fire talking over the events of the day.

The officers and Wild Bill prepared to sleep with us in the cabin, and after we had spread down our beds I spoke to Bill about the events of the morning and the loss of his horse.

"Yes," said he, "there ain't but one horse in the country that's as good as my Charlie, and maybe a little better in some ways, and that's your Black Prince; and I'm going to try to coax you boys to sell me that horse because I've fell in love with him and I need him bad in my business."

"Why, Bill," said Jack, laughing heartily at the scout's guilelessness, "you ain't no sort of a horse trader. When you want to buy a man's horse you should run him down and make him out no account instead of bragging on him."

"If I was dealing with horse-jockeys I might do that way," returned Bill, "but when I'm a-dealing with honest men who I know won't take any advantage of me I like to deal on the square with them; and I tell you, honest Injun, that Black Prince is about the best horse I ever threw a leg over. I've heard that you boys have refused an offer of two hundred and fifty dollars from some of the officers at the fort. Now, I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll give you three hundred for him; and if that ain't enough I'll give you more. I ain't got the money with me, but when we get over to the fort I can get it from Weisselbaum. Now, what do you say to that?"

It was amusing to listen to the unsophisticated proposition of this free-hearted, unselfish fellow. He did not take into consideration that he had just rendered each of us a service of far greater value than several such horses. He did not con-

sider that we were in any way indebted to him on account of his horse being killed in our service. No; that was merely one of the misfortunes of war.

But Tom, Jack, and I, although we had not said a word to each other about it, had each mentally decided that we ought to present the black horse to Wild Bill to make good his loss and to show our appreciation of his manly response and priceless service in our hour of need.

In reply to his question, "What do you say?" and an expressive look from Jack, I said:

"Not having consulted my partners about the matter, Bill, of course I can't speak for them, but I think it's a safe guess that you'll get the horse; and there is plenty of time in the future to settle on the price."

"Well, now, that's the way I like to hear you talk," said he with a gratified smile. "When we get over to the fort, you and Jack can talk it over with Tom and let me know the price you agree on, and I'll dig up the money."

The night passed quietly. As Bill had said, the hostiles had been too badly whipped to think of returning to attack us. After breakfast next morning the horses were saddled and the wagons packed; and marching out on the Fort Larned trail, the company moved first in "column of fours," followed by the two six-mule teams, and then came the "cavvy-yard," driven by the men of the guard acting as "rear-guard." Bill, Jack,

and I rode at the head of the column with the company officers.

As we reached the crest of the grade coming onto the upland, about two miles from our recent camp, with the officers we turned out on the side of the trail as the command marched by, to take a parting look at Camp Coyotelope; and we noticed what appeared to be a number of Indians—some mounted and some afoot—moving about in the vicinity of the dugouts.

"Some of To hausen's people," suggested Bill, "looking after the bodies of old Nosey and his pard and gathering up the leavings about the old camp. They'll take them two dead bucks back to their camp and bury them."

I had dismounted and taken out our field-glass to get a better view of the Indians and verified the scout's surmise, for I could plainly see a group gathered about the body of each of the two dead Indians, apparently lifting them onto their ponies.

"There, Peck," said Bill, noticing the field-glass I held, "is another thing I'd like to buy or trade you out of, for I got mine broke yesterday morning when my horse fell with me; and I need glasses, and you're going back to Leavenworth where you can easy get another pair." As he took the glass to examine it, he asked: "How much is it worth?"

"It cost us twenty dollars in Leavenworth," I replied. "They are handy things to have on the

plains, but we won't need it much going back to the settlements. I'll speak to Tom about it and I guess we'll let you have it when we get ready to start on the home-stretch from Fort Larned."

"Well, it ought to be worth more out here than it cost you in Leavenworth and I'll pay you whatever you think it's worth. Of course, I ain't got the money now, for it's going to take all I can borrow, I reckon, to pay you for this horse; but if you'll trust me till I come in to Leavenworth, I'll pay you then—that is I'm supposing that you fellows will hang up in Leavenworth for a while—anyway, till you blow in your money."

"Well, as to Tom and me," remarked Jack, "I believe each of us has planned to take a trip East when we get in, but I think it'll be a safe wager that you'll find Peck about Leavenworth, for there's a curly-headed girl there that he talks about in his sleep."

"Well, that do settle it," said Bill with a chuckle and a wink at Jack.

As we passed over the recent battle-field, we rode around and looked at the bodies of all the dead Kiowas, hoping though hardly expecting to find Satank, but were disappointed—the murderous old fiend had escaped again. These bodies were all considerably torn by the wolves, but their features were still in good enough condition to have enabled us to identify him had he been among the fallen. An inscrutable Providence permitted

this bloodthirsty demon to roam the plains for several years longer.

As we neared the post, several officers and soldiers came out to meet us, anxious to hear all about the fight. The cavvy-yard of captured ponies, with their Indian saddles and bridles, together with other trophies of the fight carried by Saunders' men, attracted much attention. Saunders' men seemed much elated over the fact that this, their first engagement with the Indians, had been so successfully planned and executed.

As the captain with his company turned off to their stable, Bill, Jack, and I, accompanied by the six-mule team carrying our plunder, moved on through the garrison and established our camp about a half mile below, in a snug bend of Pawnee Fork.

After unloading our stuff from the wagon, we sent the team back to the garrison and then set about pitching our tent and making ourselves comfortable, for we expected to have to remain here several days, partly on Tom's account and partly to wait for Kitchen's train, which was coming in from New Mexico, by which we expected to ship our wolfskins to Leavenworth, provided we did not sell them here.

After getting everything in shape, leaving Jack to mind camp and cook dinner, Bill and I returned to the post to call on Tom at the hospital, to release Found, who was still locked in Bill's room, and to bring our mule team back to camp.

We found the old man still badly crippled from the wound in his thigh, but the doctor thought he would be able to travel in a few days.

The faithful dog was glad to see us and to be released. He was quite hungry, for he had had nothing to eat since the feed I gave him in the dugout before starting him with the message to Bill.

As I was hitching up our mule team at Saunders' company stable, the captain came by and insisted on my going with him to the commissary and loading in some rations and feed which he had procured a requisition for, to replace the supplies that his men and horses had consumed at Camp Coyotelope.

The work of settling up our business affairs and getting everything ready for the return trip now devolved upon me, though I had the benefit of consultation with Tom on all matters of importance.

As already stated, our winter's catch of wolfskins numbered something over three thousand. These were all dried and baled in one of Weisselbaum's warerooms. About one fourth of these pelts were of the large gray wolves, or "lobos," as the Mexicans call them, which, at that time, were rated on the plains at one dollar and twenty-five cents each. The other three fourths were coyotes, worth seventy-five cents each. Besides these, there were several bales of the skins of the little

yellow fox, worth twenty-five cents each. At these figures, the entire lot should bring us something over twenty-six hundred dollars. On Tom's advice I offered the whole to Weisselbaum for twenty-five hundred, but he seemed to think he could get them for less and held off.

One day when negotiations had reached this stage, Kitchen's mule train rolled in and camped near us. This brought business to a focus with Weisselbaum and he immediately hurried down to our camp, accepted my offer, and wrote me out a check on Clark & Gruber* (M. E. Clark & E. H. Gruber), bankers of Leavenworth city, for twenty-five hundred dollars. In addition to this, I drew from his safe the three hundred and fifty dollars that we had deposited with him.

It is a well-known fact that in the dry, pure atmosphere of the plains, flesh wounds heal with astonishing rapidity. It may have been, in Tom's case, that the satisfactory closing up of our business affairs had something to do with it, but about this time Jack and I were astonished as well as pleased to see Tom come limping into camp and report for duty.

Bill had sent word by Tom that he, Captain Saunders, and Lieutenant Wilson were coming down to take supper with us, and just after retreat all three rode into camp accompanied by Found.

*This firm about this time minted private gold coins known as Pike's Peak coins.

"Now, boys," said Bill as he dismounted and tied Black Prince to the wagon, "you haven't told me yet how much you're going to tax me for this horse, and if you'll let me know I'll go right up to Weisselbaum's and get the greenbacks for you, for he said he'd let me have them."

"We've talked the matter over, Bill," said Tom, speaking for our party, "an' have concluded that, seeing as how you lost your best horse in our service, and in consideration of the good service you've done us all the way along, an' old-time friendship and so forth, that it'll be no more'n right for us to make you a present of Black Prince, subject only to the condition that if the rightful owner of the horse ever turns up and claims him you'll then have to make terms with him; but that's a very remote possibility."

"Do you mean it, Tom? Is that so, boys?" asked the scout in confused astonishment at such good luck as he looked around from one to another of us. "Am I to have that fine horse without paying you a dollar?"

"That's what! That's the job we've put up on you," we replied.

"Well, now, boys—" stammered Bill in a diffident sort of way as he seemed to be trying to study up a nice little speech of thanks.

"Aw, give us a rest!" interrupted old Tom in his rough and good-humored effort to help Bill out of his embarrassment. "The horse is yours, and

I don't want to hear anything more out of you about it."

Knowing that Bill was an expert shot with rifle or pistol, it had occurred to me, since he had expressed a desire to buy our field-glass, to exact of him a sample of his marksmanship as his signature to a promissory note for the price of the glass; and accordingly I had selected the ace of diamonds from our old, much-soiled deck of cards and had written across the face of it:

$20.

On demand, after date, I promise to pay to R. M. Peck the sum of Twenty Dollars, ($20.), for value received.

Wild Bill.

his mark.

FORT LARNED, KAN.
Mar. 17, 1862.

"But, Bill," I put in after Tom had cut him off short about the horse, "I ain't going to let you off so cheap on that field-glass deal. You'll have to give me your note for the twenty dollars."

"Well, I guess I can borrow that much from Cap Saunders or Mr. Wilson, here, and pay you the cash," he replied.

"No, I don't want the money—I want your note written on this card, signed by a bullet shot by you through the centre of the ace at ten paces."

Saying which, I produced the card I had prepared and read the inscription to him.

"Now, I'll tack the card up on this tree here," I continued, "and you are to stand with your back against the card, pistol in hand, step off ten paces, 'bout face, and fire a bullet through the ace. And if you don't knock the centre out it's no go—I'll have to write another note on another ace and you'll have to try it again."

"Huh! that's easy," said Bill with a grin of confidence. "You won't have to waste any more of your cards."

I knew he could do it, even at twenty paces, for I had seen him perform such feats before. With the utmost indifference, he backed up to the card on the tree, stepped off ten paces—good, long-legged measure—made a graceful "officer's about face," instantly firing, without apparently taking aim, as he came around facing the card; and we could all see the hole in the centre of the bright-red ace.

"By George, that's good shooting!" exclaimed Saunders in unfeigned astonishment. "Can you do it again, Bill, or was that just an accident?"

"I'll put another ball in the same hole for you," replied the scout carelessly as he threw up his pistol and fired.

Saunders' and Wilson's incredulity prompted them to step up to the tree and examine the card closely.

"Guess you must have missed the whole tree that time, Bill," said the captain after scrutinizing the card and tree carefully. "The hole isn't made any larger that I can see and I can't find any other hole in the tree."

"Of course not. I didn't want to spoil the card; but the second bullet is in there, right on top of the first one, and I'll bet a horse on it. Now, stand out of the way till I show you another trick. I'm going to take off the right-hand point of the diamond this time."

And at the crack of his pistol the right point disappeared—the last hole just cutting into the edge of the first one.

"Now, look out for the left-hand point."

And the left point was gone—all the red being obliterated but a little streak above and below the first hole.

"There, Peck," he remarked regretfully as he began reloading his pistol, "I had to pretty nigh spoil the card to show these fellows I wasn't a-faking."

"Don't that beat the devil?" remarked Wilson, looking from the target to Bill and from Bill to the target in undisguised astonishment.

"Well, I've heard of such phenomenal shooting," said Saunders, "but never saw the like be-

fore and wouldn't have believed it possible if I hadn't seen it. Ain't there some trick about it, Bill?"

"Not as I know of—nothing but what you've seen. Now, if you think that second shot missed the tree, Cap," remarked the scout as he took down the card and passed it around for inspection, "take that axe, there, and chop 'em all out, and if you don't find four navy balls in there I'll eat the chips."

Lieutenant Wilson seized the axe and soon cut out the four battered but distinct bullets.

"I'd give a good deal if I could shoot like that. How do you do it, Bill?" asked the captain.

"Dunno how I do it," replied the scout. "I always could put my bullets about where I wanted to and can't tell how I do it, either. I don't try very hard, but just throw her up and turn loose without taking any particular aim, and somehow the ball goes right where I look. Of course, I keep in good practice, and that helps some, I suppose."

"Practice won't explain it, captain," said old Tom. "It's a gift—a natural talent that some men find themselves possessed of. The same as some men have the natural gift of writing a beautiful hand, and do it with all ease, while others, with ever so much practice, can only acquire moderate skill. Now, Peck, Jack, or me, by constant practice, can do fairly well with a pistol or rifle;

but we can't hold a candle to Bill. The best we could probably do, on an average, at fifteen to twenty paces, would be to put three to four bullets out of six in a playing-card, which would be good shooting at a man, but Bill can put every ball just where he wants 'em to go. I've seen him shoot at a five-spot and put a ball in each spot just as somebody would call them off to him, like this, 'Centre! upper right! upper left! lower right! lower left!' putting the balls through the centre of each spot as accurately as you could punch them with a nail and hammer. And he can do nearly as well, too, mounted and on the run. But, come, men, supper's getting cold."

After supper, although his recently wounded arm was still somewhat sore, Jack got out his fiddle and played several tunes, and we all joined in singing songs.

In course of conversation I had asked Captain Saunders what had become of my former patron, Lieutenant Lang, not having seen him about the garrison recently.

"Oh, Lang's out and gone—resigned by special request. Went in on the last Santa Fé mail-coach," replied the captain. "Although you straightened up his company papers and saved him—or his rich daddy, rather—from having to pay Uncle Sam a lot of money to square up his accounts, still it was evident in many ways that he was totally incompetent to manage a company,

and he was given a hint from headquarters that his resignation would be acceptable."

Tom, Jack, and I had previously discussed the propriety of our making a present of some kind to the two officers, in testimony of our appreciation of their extremely prompt and timely response in the hour of our extremity, and, as we had nothing else available or appropriate, we had decided to abandon the plan of each having made a fine fur overcoat out of some of our beaver and otter skins and to give to each officer enough of the furs for that purpose.

At late bedtime, when the officers and Bill were getting ready to start back to the garrison, Tom brought out and gave to Saunders and Wilson each a package of beaver skins, telling them of the overcoats we had intended to make of them and suggesting that they use them for the same purpose. We also gave each officer a couple of choice buffalo robes.

"Now, men," said Saunders deprecatingly, "don't rob yourselves of these furs to reward us for doing our simple duty. We don't expect anything of the kind, are not entitled to any reward, and I don't think we ought to accept them, and——"

"But, Saunders," interrupted Lieutenant Wilson, "when you come to think of the princely overcoats these beaver furs will make, it seems to me there would be no harm in accepting them

—not as pay for doing our duty but just as tokens of friendship and good-will from these men."

"Now you're getting it through you," said Tom approvingly. "That's the idea—just a friendly gift." And before Saunders could enter another remonstrance he added, as he gathered up an armful of the robes and skins: "Come, Jack, bring the rest and we'll tie them on their horses for them."

As the three men mounted we bade them a cordial good-by and expressed a hope to soon meet them again in Leavenworth. We each gave Found an affectionate farewell hug, for we sincerely regretted parting with him.

"You'd best keep Found tied up for a few days, Bill," suggested Jack as they started off, "lest he should scent our trail and follow us. And always take good care of him, for he's got more genuine nobility in him than lots of the so-called men I've met with."

"You bet Found'll never want for good treatment while I'm around," answered Bill; and then, "Ta, ta, fellows, I'll see you in Leavenworth before long," he called back as they rode away into the darkness.

During this day Mr. Kitchen, the proprietor of the neighboring train, had visited our camp and, after inspecting our wagon, team, and camp outfit closely, had asked if it would be for sale when we got through to Leavenworth.

I answered: "Yes."

"What will you take for it delivered to me there in as good condition as it is now?" he asked, adding: "I shall be close on your heels going in."

After conferring with my partners we agreed to deliver the outfit in good shape at Jim Brown's livery stable, Fourth and Shawnee Streets, Leavenworth, for five hundred dollars. Kitchen readily agreed to take it and paid us a hundred dollars down to clinch the bargain.

CHAPTER XXVI

BACK TO GOD'S COUNTRY

WE were a cheerful trio next morning as we started out of camp on the home-stretch for "God's country," with Jack singing: "Ain't we glad to get out of the wilderness!"

I had brought my captured ponies along, thinking to use them for riding stock going in and to realize something on them after we reached Leavenworth, and for the first day tried them—Jack riding one and I the other—but they were in such poor condition that by the time we had reached Charley Rath's ranch, the first evening, I saw that they were not going to be able to stand the travel on grass alone—and I had been unable to teach them to eat grain—so I left them with Charley, with a note to Wild Bill requesting him to dispose of them to the best advantage for me, which he did, turning in the money to me a few weeks later in Leavenworth.

Our bales of peltries made a bulky but not heavy load, and our two mules and two broncos hauled it with ease, and, though we were all anxious now to reach the end of our journey, still we

were under contract to deliver the team to Mr. Kitchen in Leavenworth in good condition and, therefore, must not overdrive.

Of course each one of us was now doing some lively planning for the future.

"Well, taking all things into consideration," remarked Jack, the first evening after we had got settled in camp, "though we're glad to get out of the wilderness for a while, we've done pretty well this winter. We've had lots of fun, some lively adventures, and we've made more money than we had any idea of when we started into the business."

"Yes," I replied, "we'll each have something over a thousand dollars in clear cash for our winter's work, when we divide up, and that's more money than I ever possessed before—how is it with you fellows?"

"Same here," said Jack.

"Me, too," said Tom.

"Well," I continued, "I suppose each one of you is studying out how he can quickest blow it in before re-enlisting?"

"I don't know about that," replied old Tom. "I expect to re-enlist after a bit, of course, for soldiering's the only trade I know and I haven't really much use for the money, but I'll not squander it foolishly. I've studied out a better use for it. I have a widowed sister with several children living on a little farm back in Pennsylvania, and they only make a poor, cornbread

living off the place by close economy. I've made up my mind that the best use I can put this money to is to go back there and fix them up in good shape—and then I'm off to the war."

"Good for you, Tom," I said approvingly, "but then I naturally expected that you would put your money to a sensible use. How is it with Jack?"

And Tom and I turned our inquiring looks to the Irishman.

"I know what you think," retorted he quickly. "You think you know what'll get away with Jack's money. In your minds you see my money going for whiskey and me never drawing a sober breath till I'm down to bed-rock. But I'm going to fool you. I've been doing some thinking for myself—and that's a rare thing for Jack, you know—an' I says to myself, says I, 'Jacky, boy, this is the time of your life to do some good for your poor kindred in ould Ireland.' I haven't heard from any of them for several years and don't know who of them is living an' who is dead. But I've made up my mind that when we get into Leavenworth not a drop will I touch, and soon as I crook me fingers on that money I'll hit the trail for New York, take passage for the ould dart, and if I can find any of my family living I'll bring them back with me to this glorious land of liberty, where one man's as good as another and a blamed sight better if he behaves himself decently. And

mind you, now, I'm not going to touch a drop of liquor till I get back from the ould country. And then, of course, I'll re-enlist, for soldiering's my best hold."

Before he was done speaking each of us had extended a hand to give him a hearty hand shake of encouragement in his good resolution.

"My boy," said old Tom, with tears in his eyes, as he took one of Jack's hands in both his, "you don't know how glad it makes me to hear you talk that way. If you'll only stick to it, I'd give the half of my possessions to help you carry out that resolution."

"Same here, Jack," I added.

"Well, I'm going to show you that I can and will do it."

After a little pause Tom inquired:

"But now about yourself, Peck. What do you expect to do with yourself?"

"Well, I've made up my mind that I'll not re-enlist," I replied. "I've had soldiering enough, I think; but I suppose I'll have to enter Uncle Sam's service in some shape or other. I noticed when we were in Leavenworth before that the quartermaster's department at the fort is fitting out a good many trains of new six-mule teams; and, as that is something to my notion, I think I'll try for a job as wagon-master."

When we reached Council Grove, then the gateway of the border settlements, we felt as if we were

really getting back into "God's country." As we passed the place where we had had the controversy with the jayhawkers, we stopped a little while to have a chat with the old storekeeper and told him the disposition we had made of the black horse. He had never heard of any owner of the horse and did not think it probable that Wild Bill would ever be disturbed in his possession of him. He had heard nothing more concerning the jayhawkers after they were gobbled up by the soldiers and taken to the military prison at Fort Leavenworth.

When we reached Leavenworth City, we again put up at Ned Welch's boarding-house, on Seneca Street, and our team at Jim Brown's stable.

A few days later, on the arrival of Mr. Kitchen's train, we transferred our team and camp outfit to him, as per agreement, divided up the cash proceeds of our expedition, and the wolf hunters disbanded, promising to keep track of each other in the future by correspondence.

Then Jack and Tom started East, intending to travel together as far as Pennsylvania.

I parted with my dear comrades with sincere regret, fearing that in the vicissitudes of the great war then getting under good headway, I might never see them again.

When next I heard from Jack he had re-enlisted and was back in the old company again. In the war he did gallant service and received some hon-

orable scars, re-enlisted again after the war and in his last enlistment took service in the Seventh Cavalry, and was one of the last remnant of that doomed band who with their gallant leader met a heroic death on that fatal knoll by the Little Big Horn River on Sunday, June 25, 1876. With few serious faults, and many virtues, our untutored, wild Irishman was a brave, unselfish, and manly man.

Tom carried out his plan of using his money for the benefit of his widowed sister and her children on the little farm in Pennsylvania, saw them comfortably fixed, and then went to Washington, where, through the influence of army officers who had known him in the service he obtained a commission as captain in a volunteer cavalry regiment, soon rose to be colonel of the regiment, and at the close of the war was a brevet brigadier-general, commanding a brigade.

He had hoped when the war ended to obtain a commission in the regular army, but his wounds so far disabled him as to unfit him for active service in the regulars. He was, therefore, compelled to accept a pension and retired to the little farm to try to content himself with the dull life of citizen.

After years of perilous adventures and desperate encounters on the frontier, Wild Bill was finally assassinated in the city of Deadwood, South Dakota, by a wretched gambler.

And I? Well, of course, I married "the girl I left behind me" in Leavenworth City, for which piece of wisdom—or good fortune—I have always congratulated myself. After getting married I took service with Uncle Sam as a wagon-master, in which capacity I served through the Civil War, in Kansas, Missouri, Arkansas, and the Indian Nation.

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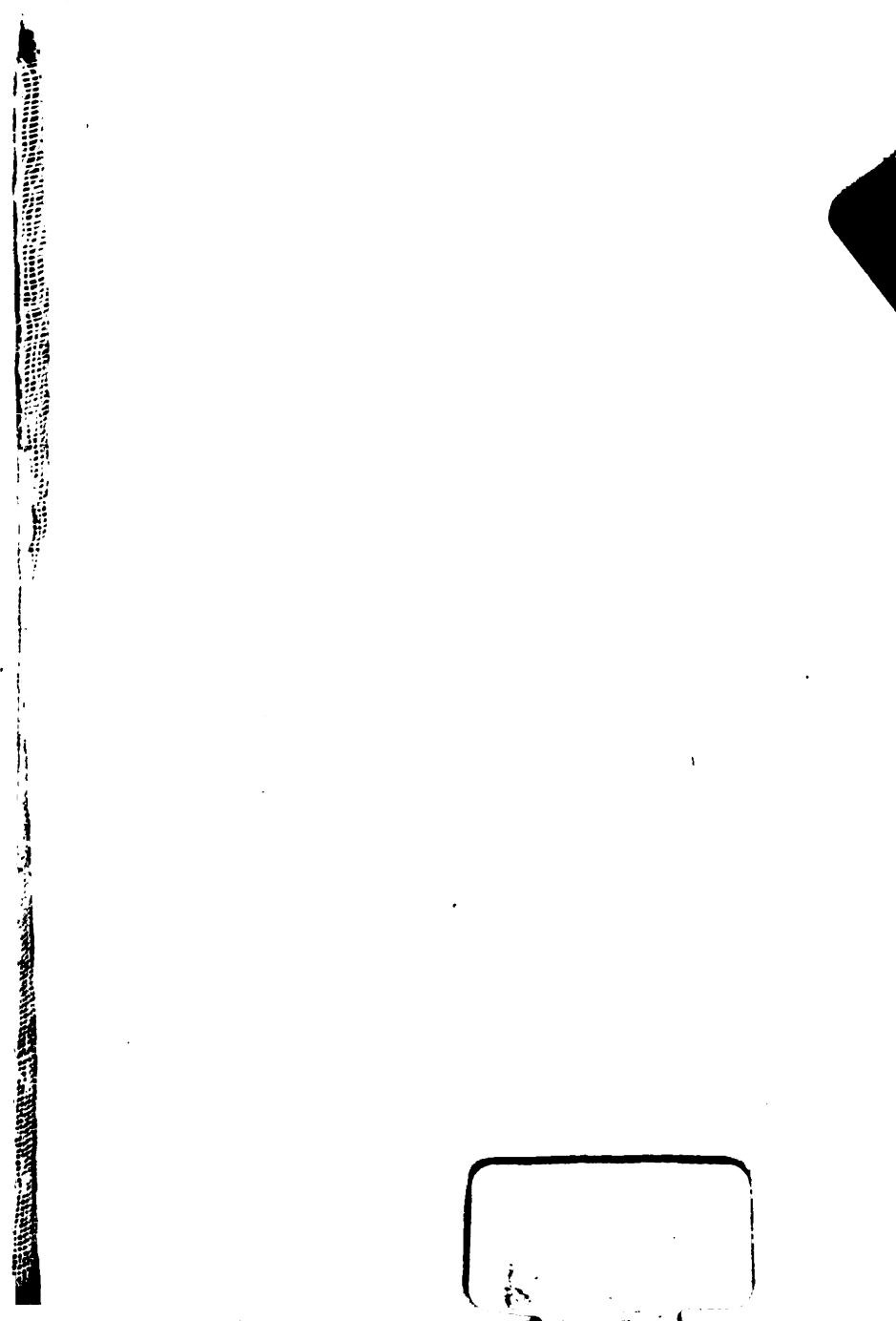
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